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ARCHDEACON HOLDEN'S TRIBULATION.



HE was so frail and small that the country squires who came in at the one stopping-place and left the train at the next, and talked of petty sessions and highway-boards in a strong slow way, like men with a tight grasp of a slippery subject, felt fatherly towards her; and so fair that their sons found out new and painful ways of sitting which hid dirty boots, and strange modes of propping their guns which employed hands suddenly gifted with a sense of over-abundance; and so dainty, yet withal bright of eye and lip, that a gentleman who got in one stage from Stirhamp-

ton, and knew her, was tormented by his fancy: which pictured her as a sparkling gem in its nest of jeweller's satin. Altogether so frail and fair and dainty was this passenger; and yet in the flush of her young beauty and fearless nature, there was about her so imperious a charm that they all, though they might travel with her but three miles—it was a dreadful train,—and exchange with her not three words, became her slaves. And the gentleman who knew her grovelled before her in spirit to an extent unbecoming in a man, much more in a clergyman and a curate.

She was popular, too. For though she parted from him at the door of the carriage, she fell in almost at once with another who knew her. His business, as far as any save chatting with her was apparent, seemed to be about the book-stall. And after she had gone laughing from him, and the servant who met her—and was equally her slave with all the others, though he was more like a bishop and a father of the Church than they promised ever to be—had taken her luggage in charge, she met yet another, who blushed, and bowed, and smiled, and stammered before her after his kind. With him she was very merry until their roads diverged—if he had any road which was not of the nature of the last one's business. And then she tripped on just as gaily with a very tall acquaintance—they were all of one sex—and after him with another, who took up the walking where his predecessor left off, just for all the world as if she were a royal letter, and they were those old Persian post-runners, who made so little of 'parasangs,' and whose roads seemed always to be through 'Paradises.' But this last one brought her to the rectory gates, and—much lamenting—left her.

There was only Granny in the drawing-room when Dorothy ran up stairs. Granny, who was eighty-seven, and with a screen at her back and a wood-fire toasting her old toes, could tell wonderful tales of the great war. Who had heard '*Clarissa*' read aloud *coram puellis*, and at times shocked a mealy-mouthed generation by pure plain-speaking. She was the Archdeacon's grandmother; but to Dorothy what relation she was, or whether she was any relation, not all Stirhampton could tell—though it spent itself in guessing, and dallied to some extent with a suggestion that she was Dorothy's great-great aunt; not, however, committing itself to this, nor altogether breaking with a rival theory, that they were first cousins three times removed.

Whatever she was, Dorothy hugged her a score of times, and the tiny old lady said, 'God bless you, my dear,' half as many, and was going on to her full number, when the Archdeacon himself came in. He, too, smiled upon seeing the girl, and smoothed his ruffled brow, and tried to be as if the drawing-room—when he was in it—were all his world. For this was a part of the Archdeacon's system, and he was of note through four dioceses as a man of system. So he patted the girl's hair, and said kindly:

'Well, my dear, I trust you have had a pleasant visit?'

'Oh, charming! and yet I am so glad to be at home again! But, guardian, what is the matter?'

The Archdeacon was vexed and pleased. Vexed that his attempt had not succeeded, and pleased that he could now tell his trouble. 'The matter, my dear?' he said, taking a turn up and down the room; 'why, I am greatly annoyed and put out. I never knew such a thing happen before.'

Granny clasped her hands upon the arms of her chair in sudden excitement. 'It isn't overdrawn, George, is it?' she said, nervously.

'Overdrawn!' he replied, cheerfully, 'not at all.' There had been a time when he was not an archdeacon, or a rector, or even in orders, but only a hard-reading undergraduate, when Granny's banking account had been with great difficulty kept above zero. Then it was her bugbear; now the family fortunes were as solidly substantial as the comfortable red brick rectory itself; but Granny found some difficulty in laying her bogey. 'Not at all. Not so bad as that,' he said, cheerfully; 'but very annoying, nevertheless. I was writing my Sunday evening sermon this afternoon—as I always do, you know, on Friday—when Whiteman came running in to me at five minutes after four, and said there was no one at the church to take the four o'clock service. Of course I had to break off and go. The congregation had to wait fully ten minutes. It is not so much the inroad upon my time, though that is not unimportant, as the lack of system, that I deplore. Maddy and Moser—they were the married curates, and took charge of the two chapels of ease—are, of course, engaged elsewhere; but surely one of the other five might have been there. It is a piece of gross carelessness on the part of some one.'

Dorothy nodded and looked gravely into the teapot. 'And I saw Mr. Gray on my way from the station!' she said.

'Ah, just so. You did not meet any of the others?'

'Yes, I think I did,' she replied, with a great show of candour. 'Of course, I saw Mr. Bigham by the Church Club, and Mr. Brune in Wych Street.'

'Brune is the culprit, I expect. I do not think it would be Charles Emerson's fault, because he is unwell.'

'Unwell!' cried the girl, impulsively. 'Indeed, he is quite ill; I never saw anyone look so bad.'

'Oh! and where may you have seen *him*? 'asked the Archdeacon, stopping suddenly in his promenade of the room, and facing her.

Dorothy bit her tongue to punish it. There is nothing so

dangerous as a half-confidence. It so often leads, will-he-nill-he, to a whole one. 'He got into the train at Bromfield. He had walked out there,' she said, meekly. Surprisingly meekly for her.

'Quite so. And may I ask whereabouts you met his brother?'

'Met his brother?'

'Yes, my dear,' said the Archdeacon, suavely. 'Met his brother, Mr. Philip Emerson?'

'Let me see,' murmured Dolly, with a vast pretence of considering, though her little ears were scarlet by this time. 'Where did I meet Mr. Philip? Of course, I met him at the station. But however did you know?' she asked, with the utmost effrontery.

'When one sheep, Dorothy, jumps over a gap, all the flock follow. Four of my curates being so busily engaged meeting my ward, I had little doubt but that the fifth was as well occupied.'

Unseen by him, she made a face at Granny, who was understood to say that boys would be boys.

'And sheep, sheep!' retorted the Archdeacon, with sharpness.

'They did not tell me that they had come to meet me,' said Dolly, rebelliously. She did not like that proverb—or whatever it was—about sheep.

The Archdeacon frowned. 'No,' he said, severely, 'but I do not doubt that you would have been better pleased with them if they had. Let me speak to you seriously, Dorothy. I cannot—I really cannot—have you distracting these young men in this way. I observed before you left several little matters of this kind—little laxities, and a want of energy and punctuality, on their part that were due, I fear, to your influence.'

'Little laxities!' murmured she, 'I never heard of such things.' But he put her aside with a grand wave of his hand.

'I am not inclined to say it is altogether your fault. You cannot help your looks or your youth, but you can avoid being a hindrance instead of an assistance in the parish. I must not suffer'—he was working himself into a well-regulated passion—'my arrangements to be disorganised even by you. I will not and I cannot say, were this to go on, what steps it might not be my duty, however painful, to take.'

After uttering this tremendous threat the Archdeacon walked hastily across the room, and, turning, looked to see what effect it had had upon his ward. She was playing with her tea-spoon, tapping petulantly with her foot, reddening, and pouting, and

glancing for sympathy at Granny; behaving altogether like a naughty school-girl under reproof. He took another turn, feeling that he did well—thoroughly well, to be angry; and looked again. She had risen, and was leaving the room. He could only see her back. I don't know what it was—perhaps he could not tell himself—in the pose of her little head and her shoulders, or whether it was something quite outside her—which made him step after her, and touch her shoulder gently.

'There, there!' he said, staying her kindly. 'My scolding has not been very dreadful, Dorothy. We must be good friends again. Will you please to give me my second cup, and then I will go back and finish—my other sermon.'

Granny looked surprised, and Dorothy laughed as brightly as if there were not and never had been in the world such a thing as a tear. For the Archdeacon rarely made a joke, even a little one. Jokes cannot be made upon system, and Archdeacon Holden had found system so good a thing that any pursuit which did not admit of it was apt to be out of favour with him. He was gifted with great powers of organisation, and these he had used well, and found sufficient, so that by their means, without being a great preacher or a small controversialist, without inventing a new doctrine, or reviving an old garment, he had risen to preferment. He was little more than thirty when he was presented to the living of Stirhampton; and though the parish was over-populated and under-churched, he reduced it in ten years to such a condition that it ranked as a model and its rector as a great man, often consulted by the heads of the Church upon parochial matters. Moreover, men talked of him as of one likely to rise higher.

In person he was a tall, well-favoured man, in the prime of life, with hair just beginning to be flecked with grey. He had nothing of the ascetic in his appearance, though his manners were cold and reserved; but he was liberal, and had good nature and good temper, as well as good parts. These qualities, however, the strict formality of his habits, and his rigid adherence to rule, hid in a great measure from all who were not well acquainted with the man.

To Dorothy he had been almost a father; and would perhaps have come to be looked upon entirely in that light, but that he was betrayed from time to time by little things. For instance, what do fathers—ordinary allowance-making, bill-paying fathers—know of their girl's dresses? The smallest chit in the nursery

will tell you, nothing. And Carrie and Edie are so persuaded of this that they will flaunt their new seal-skins—which have not been paid for, and are absurdly inconsistent with papa's allowance—under his very nose, without the slightest tremor; and Flo will wear three new dresses in a quarter with as little chance of being prematurely found out in her extravagance, as if they were three new pairs of mittens. But in this respect the Archdeacon was not Dorothy's father. For not only did he observe during the few days which followed his scolding that she had not forgotten it; that she went sadly—or seemed to go sadly—about the house, and shunned his visitors with a pensive air, leaving Mr. Maddy, who was over fifty, and had seven children, to pour out his own tea. Not only did he note this, but when Dorothy appeared at breakfast upon the fourth morning with a demure face and down-cast eyes, he marked the novelty of her quaker-like grey dress, with its plain collar and cuffs, as quickly as did Granny.

'That is very becoming, Dorothy,' he remarked, pleasantly. He wished to be upon the old footing with her. To tell you the truth, he was tired of that going sadly. The house seemed as soberly dull as when she was away. And of late he had come to think it was rather a dull house. She had been away a good deal.

'Becoming!' cried Dolly, to his surprise, in a piteous voice. 'And I had thought that this would do.'

'Would do, my dear? What do you mean? So it does. It seems to me to do excellently.' He was slightly taken aback.

'But I thought you said it was becoming?' she cried, querulously. 'You did, too. I heard it quite plainly.'

'Well, my dear, and what more would you wish me to say? It is—it is very becoming.'

He tried to speak in a tone at once critical and archidiaconal, such a tone as the palæontologist adopts when he admires a bone of the pliocene mammoth in the case of a rival collector, or as paterfamilias uses when praising—to order—his girls' bonnets. He did not altogether succeed. The ribs of that primitive animal, though they have pretty curves enough, do not preen themselves before a mirror with a little fluttering blush, and bright backward glances, and quick-straying dainty fingers adjusting here and defining there; nor do they form together a picture such as none but paterfamilias himself—no *locum tenens*, for instance—can look on with a perfectly even pulse-beat. The Archdeacon felt that his

tone was not quite the tone he had, so to speak, commissioned, and swallowed half a cup of hot coffee at a gulp.

'Oh, dear!' he cried, hastily.

'Oh, dear!' echoed the girl, stamping her foot in a pet. 'Then I don't know what to do. I am sure I thought this would please you, and I should not be likely to—to do what you said I did in this. But now I shall not know what to do.'

And she ran out of the room, leaving her guardian in a state of much doubt as to whether she were laughing or crying; and perplexed, too, by uncertainty whether that grey dress sprang from a conscientious endeavour after sedateness, a real desire to improve—for oft the habit doth proclaim the mind—or from a freakish, wicked, contrary, wilful, teasing spirit, such as old Mrs. Fretchett had told him inhabited the bodies of young girls.

Alas! he was soon driven to be of old Mrs. Fretchett's opinions. There was no more sedateness, no more going sadly, after this; nor ever did scolding seem more entirely thrown away than that extempore sermon upon the day of Dolly's return. She was gayer, prettier, more heedless, more flighty than of old. The drawing-room was never free from curates now, whose business might indeed be with the Archdeacon; but by the time he was ready to talk it over, to audit their accounts, or sign their cheques, the gentlemen were always upstairs, and—*difficilis descensus Olympi*. There were rumours of disagreements among the black-coated ones. The parish districts—and especially their lady visitors—declared that they were neglected; the rector never got a quiet cup of tea in his own house, nor even a quiet placid moment; for the sounds of young people laughing and, as Mrs. Fretchett called it, 'fribbling' upstairs would float down to him working in his study, and then he would pish and pshaw, and move his chair impatiently. And no wonder. It meant that the parish was taking its chance; it meant that his system was breaking down. He knew it did. He told himself he did well to be angry. And he did thoroughly well; but after all it gave him small satisfaction. He began to feel more sore, and think more seriously about the matter every day. He could not have the work of ten years and more undone in this absurd fashion. Some remedy must be found. He might get rid of all the curates in a body, for violent diseases call for violent remedies; but that might not turn out a remedy. Or Dorothy might be—well, not dismissed exactly—but disposed of out of the way in some sort or other. The more Archdeacon

Holden thought it over, the more he was forced to the opinion that his duty lay in this direction. And then something happened which brought matters to a head.

It was on the day of the Grammar School sports, which were held by his permission in the large field at the back of the rectory, where the old town wall, running round two sides of the enclosure, afforded a capital place of vantage for such spectators as did not wish to enter the ground. It was past five o'clock, and the sports were over. Of course the Archdeacon had attended them; and then he had retired to his study, and was thinking of going upstairs to tea, when a renewal of the shouting in the rear of the house attracted his attention. Wondering what this might be he mounted to the drawing-room, and finding only Granny there, fenced in as usual with her screen, walked to the further window which overlooked the field. The sports, to all appearance, had been resumed, late as it was; for though the ground was almost clear, a crowd was fast collecting upon the wall, and he could make out figures—it was just growing dusk—moving quickly round the ropes, which had not been taken away. One, two, three, four, five black figures moving swiftly in single file.

‘I am afraid this won’t do. I don’t think that this can be allowed,’ he was beginning, shaking his head slowly, under the impression that the town boys had taken advantage of the place and occasion to get up a little impromptu competition of their own. ‘I don’t think—good heavens!’

Granny awoke upon the instant, the Archdeacon’s voice rang out so loud in anger and reprobation. ‘What is it?’ the old lady said, weakly, feeling for her stick. ‘What is it, my dear? I hope it is not much. You know it is very near quarter day, George, very near, and some money will be paid in then. Dear me, dear me!’

Even in his wrathful astonishment the Archdeacon tried to say gently, ‘It is not that, Granny. It is nothing of any consequence. I shall be back in a moment.’

And then he ran downstairs. ‘Nothing of any consequence,’ indeed; three steps at a time, and so, bare-headed and his skirts flying behind him, reached the terrace, taking no notice of a couple of maids in the hall, who were looking through a window and giggling, and who fled at his approach. On the terrace, with a charming hood over her head, was Dorothy, looking down into the field, and now laughing and now clapping a pair of

little gloved hands in great delight, a white rose on the wall before her. He scarce looked at her, but peered into the dusk. Yes, his eyes had not played him false. The five athletes speeding round the roped circle were his five curates, and none others.

'Isn't it fun?' cried Dorothy at his side, all unconscious of his feelings. 'The boys were nothing to them, they look so funny



in their long coats. They are walking a mile, and the winner is to have this rose. Don't you think Mr. Bigham is gaining?'

The Archdeacon was speechless. He glared at this mocker, and then at the crowd upon the wall opposite—the cheering, shouting, growing crowd—and breathed hard. Funny! Fun! Had the girl lost all sense of decorum? He would waste no words upon her; but he ran down the steps and strode across the grass

as swiftly as his dignity, a little impaired by haste and passion, would permit. Fortunately the competitors were just then at the near side of the circle. But, for that very reason, by the time he approached the ropes, the walkers, who had only eyes for one another and that slender figure on the terrace, had passed the point nearest to him, and were speeding away quite unconscious of their superior's presence. He thought he should cut off the last man, and increased his pace. He called to him and waved his hand. But Mr. Brune, intent upon the business before him, and going steadily like a machine heel and toe, his elbows well in, and his eyes upon the small of his predecessor's back, neither saw nor heard him. The Archdeacon was excited and provoked. In the heat of the moment he followed, still calling to him; and, being quite fresh, began to overhaul Mr. Brune. He did not hear a louder shout rise from the crowd upon the wall; he did not hear his ward clapping her hands in a perfect ecstasy of delight; he did not—indeed he could not—hear the giggling of the maids at the hall window. But all these people and everybody else thought that he had joined in the 'parsons' race.' Some, like Dorothy, thought it was very nice 'and liberal' of him; and more, like Mrs. Fretthett, who had a fine view from her window, thought it very odd of him. And the faster he pressed on to catch Brune, becoming with every stride more and more angry, the more the crowd upon the wall shouted, and Dolly clapped, and Brune increased his speed, and the maids giggled; until at length the Archdeacon, beginning to suspect that his own position was far from dignified, and a glimmer of the light in which he was being viewed by others dawning upon him, broke into a run, and the crowd into a shout of reprobation of his unfairness; and then at last he laid his hand upon Mr. Brune's shoulder.

'Stop, Mr. Brune,' he gasped; 'stop! This is most unseemly. Do you hear? Most unseemly! I exceedingly disapprove of this—this disgraceful exhibition. Do you see the people, sir?'

This at last brought Mr. Brune to a standstill. He was a pitiable object as, hot, dishevelled, and panting, his tie awry and his collar rumpled, he stared, dumbfounded, into his superior's flushed and indignant face. He tremulously wiped his brow, and by a tremendous effort recovered his eyeglasses from between his shoulders, where they had been swinging rhythmically. He put them on and looked round. Then he became aware of the spectators who had gathered since he and his fellows had, in quite

a private way, started on their little frolic, and the affair became apparent to him in its true colours. For, left to themselves, and unperturbed by Dolly and unreasoning rivalry, there were no curates anywhere of more proper ideas than the Archdeacon's. Brune dropped his glasses, quite crushed; but, seeing the necessity for action, revived. He did what the Archdeacon should have done at first. He jumped over the ropes and ran across to stay the others.

Their rector did not wait to speak with them then, but, still frowning, stalked back to the terrace, striving to recover his self-possession upon his way. With but partial success, for as he mounted the steps, 'Oh, guardian!' cried a merry laughing voice from above him, 'what is the matter? Why did you stop? I am sure you would have beaten them all if you had gone on as well as you started. You walked capitally. And why have they all stopped?'

'Because they have come to their senses,' he said, hoarsely, striving vainly to repress his passion. 'Have you ever heard of Circe, girl?'

Dolly only stared. This tone at any rate she had never heard before.

'Because my parish is not large enough to contain her foolish rout and their senseless tricks. They were walking for a rose, were they?' he continued, bitterly. What he had said already seemed to have hurt the girl not one whit, only surprised her; and he was terribly exasperated. 'I suppose that is but a pretty figure of speech, and stands for yourself. I am surprised you have so much modesty. It is fitting and maidenly in my ward to offer herself as the prize of a public walking match.'

Her face turned white in the dusk. 'How dare you?' she cried, starting back as if he had struck her. He had hurt her at last, if that was what he wished to do. 'How dare you?' she cried, passionately. But this time there came a quiver in her voice and a catching of her breath, and before he could be ready for this change of front she was gone, and he heard her sobbing bitterly as she passed through the hall. Only the white rose lay where she had flung it.

He went into his study and sat down very miserably, thinking, no doubt, over the state of the parish, and of what Mrs. Fretchett would say, and took no tea that evening. Only at one time or another, before nine o'clock prayers, he saw all the five curates.

At dinner he was very silent, looking from time to time curiously at Dolly, who was silent too, attending chiefly to Granny's wants, and avoiding his eyes with a conscious shrinking, new in her and strangely painful to him.

But the Archdeacon had made up his mind, and before twenty-four hours were over had put it before Dorothy. First, however, he had asked her pardon quite formally for what he had said in his haste; and the strange look which pained him had passed from the girl's face, as melts a shadow cast by a cloud that was before the sun, and suddenly, even as we look up, is not. And then he had gone on to speak seriously to her of the state of his parish, touching upon the report of the previous day's doings, which was already abroad, and which Dolly, with some temper and as much justice, set down to Mrs. Fretchett.

'Well, my dear,' the Archdeacon answered pleasantly, though in a tone which made her look sharply at him, 'she and I are—well, old enough to remember that you are young, and, as Granny says, young folks will be young. Still I am bound to take care that the interests of my parish come first. It must not suffer through anyone, even through you. And suffer it does, Dolly; which brings me to the other matter. An opportunity offers—I may say, three opportunities—of solving our difficulty. I have told you that you are too thoughtless for a clergyman's daughter, but I think you would make a good and true clergyman's wife.'

Crash! Dorothy had dropped the paper-weight with which she was playing. He let her stoop to pick it up, which she did clumsily, and was long about it, and then he went on. 'I have had three proposals for your hand, my dear. I do not know that this *embarras de richesses* is altogether to your credit, but so it is. Three of your fellow-culprits of yesterday, Philip Emerson, Mr. Bigham, and Mr. Brune are anxious to press their suits. They all have some means, and are young men of whom, notwithstanding that little affair, I can approve.'

She was drawing outlines on her work-table with one white forefinger. 'I don't think I want to marry either of them,' she murmured with much indifference, considering the effect of an imaginary landscape with her head on one side.

The Archdeacon frowned. 'They think that you have given them reason to hope.'

'They cannot all think that!' she retorted, pouting scornfully. And the worst of it was that he could not controvert this.

'Philip Emerson, Dorothy, seemed in particular to fancy he had received some encouragement.

'Oh,' said Dolly, 'I should like to ask him what he meant; I don't think he would dare to say it to my face. Perhaps he meant this!' She went on contemptuously, rummaging in her work-basket—

'For all I can remember he may have given it to me. One of them did, I know. Isn't it nonsense?'

She held a crumpled scrap of paper towards her guardian, and he took it with the air of a man accepting service of a writ. 'Am I to read it?' he asked stiffly.

'Of course—I suppose he intended it to be read.'

And the Archdeacon holding it gingerly, just as if it were the royal invitation before mentioned, read a few lines—

'Ah, great grey eyes, that, in my true love's face,
Tell of the pure and noble soul within
One look in your calm depths I fain would trace,
I fain would win.'

and threw it down with a contemptuous 'pshaw!' He looked through the window for a moment before he spoke again; then with a great show of cheerfulness he said, 'Now, my dear, let us be serious, which of them would you like to see yourself?'

'Which of them!' she answered impatiently. 'None of them—ever! I hate them! That is, I mean that I don't want to marry them.'

'I shall not let you give that answer without thought. It seems to me that you must have encouraged one or the other of them. You must take a fortnight to think it over.'

'I won't have a minute!' she cried angrily.

'A clear fortnight,' he repeated with some sternness. 'If you are then resolved, I shall be the last to force you to marry against your will. I have, indeed, no legal power over you. I am not your father.'

'No, you are not,' she replied sullenly.

That pained the Archdeacon more than all that had gone before. It was not only thoughtless, it was ungracious, it was ungrateful, and it hardened his heart so that he spoke out what was in his thoughts.

'Quite so,' he began. 'I was only going to say that if at the end of the time you found yourself unable to embrace'—

'I am a woman, if I am your ward,' suddenly and spitefully.

'—to embrace this opportunity,' shot out the clergyman, very red in the face, 'then I should have to make an alteration in my household; in what direction, you will, no doubt, be able to guess.'

She bent over her work and made no reply, so that he felt a cruel satisfaction that he had at last managed to cow her. Then, as there seemed no more to be said, the Archdeacon went downstairs and tried to feel content with his partial success. One way or another the difficulty would now be settled. And this being so, if he sighed over the consideration of this comfortable fact, we may presume that the sigh was one of relief.

The gravity which on a sudden fell upon the rectory folk was not unmarked by Stirhampton. But Stirhampton felt no surprise at it. Stirhampton well understood the cause of it. What wonder, asked Stirhampton, if the Archdeacon looked perplexed, and Miss Dorothy gloomy, and the curates anxious? What wonder, indeed, when as sure as eggs were what they seemed to be—and there they generally were—the Court of Arches had its eyes upon Stirhampton, and sentences of suspension were in the air, and there was even talk of unfrocking! so that much discussion was raised in town circles as to the details of that ceremony, and whether a cook's cleaver did, or did not, figure in it, and if it did, in what particular way it was used? What wonder, indeed? though those who knew best whispered that the race for the girl's hand (oh, those giggling eaves-dropping maids!), disgraceful as it was in men of their calling and the Archdeacon's age, might—observe—*might* have been overlooked. 'But when it came,' said these, 'to the Archdeacon, in his chagrin at being outstripped by younger men, striking Mr. Brune, and knocking his own curate over the ropes, so that the very crowd cried shame! that was indeed going a little too far. There could be no winking at that, be the authority ever so favourable to him.'

Still there are always froward people who will have no fire where others have been the first to espy the smoke. There were these at Stirhampton, men who were rude and said it was all fiddle-de-dee when Mrs. Fretchett said it was *scandalum magnatum*—a plain and unmannerly contradiction—and made themselves otherwise unpleasant. But even these grew silent after a time, when a very weighty fact came to be known. Two official letters—missives were the more proper word—of most threatening

appearance had been delivered at the rectory. Their envelopes had been stamped with the name of an august street, and bore also in the left-hand bottom corner a distinguished title. On one had been a twopenny stamp. Timid people scanned the rector with curious pity, and such upon the whole was the effect of this postal intelligence that the doctrine of *scandalum magnatum* gained almost universal credence; even the froward ones grew serious and thought it over.

It was probably from a feeling of delicacy that they refrained from carrying their surmises to the Archdeacon. To the curates some hints were given, but what with their obtuseness—they scarcely seemed to understand—and a fretful touchy disposition, noticeable in young men, nothing came of these hints.

Of all the rectory folk, it was Dolly only who (oh, those giggling, tattling maids!) came to hear of the rumour. It distressed her beyond measure. She could not feel sure that it was untrue. Nay, she knew that one part was true, for had she not seen the Archdeacon read one and the other of the letters mentioned, and immediately thereafter fall into deep thought. Ever since he had been grave and preoccupied. Her ideas upon unfrocking—though the cleaver was not one of them—were sufficiently terrible, and grew more and more vivid and daunting the longer she dwelt upon them. Yet there was not between herself and her guardian such an amount of confidence as made it easy for her to speak to him upon such a subject.

So poor Dorothy knew not what to think. She had her own little distresses, we know; but they were forgotten in this greater apprehension that she had brought grief and disgrace upon the Archdeacon. And when, about the end of the fortnight, he bade her come to his study, she thought of them only as matters of be put aside, if mentioned, as quickly as possible, as matters to no importance in the face of the blow she felt was about to fall.

Archdeacon Holden was writing steadily. He looked up at her entrance to point with a faint smile to a chair, and then went on with his work. She fancied that there was something strange and new in his air; she marked under the paper-weight the letters about which all the town was talking; at her elbow she spied an envelope addressed to the Dean and Chapter of W—, the patron of the living, and Dorothy felt sick at heart.

Whether he was or was not aware of the direction of her

thoughts, he folded his letter slowly, willing, perhaps, to put off as long as possible the evil day when something must be told. It was not until he had risen and approached the fireplace, so that his back was towards her, that he said pleasantly :

‘Well, Dorothy, we will talk of your affairs first.’

‘They will not occupy you long,’ was her quiet answer ; what were these things to her now ? ‘I have made up my mind, or rather it is unchanged. If I have thoughtlessly caused pain to Mr. Emerson and the others, I am sorry ; but I cannot marry any of them.’

He did not speak for a moment. Perhaps his thoughts had gone off to his own matters, for his hand shook a little as he adjusted the date-case over the mantelpiece. ‘You are quite sure, my dear ?’ he said at last. There was no displeasure in his tone.

‘I am quite sure.’

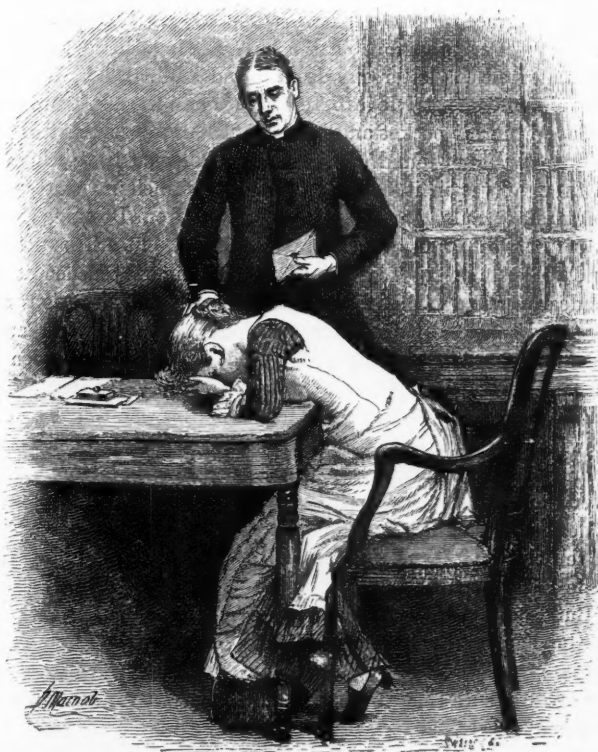
‘Well, that would have been an embarrassing answer, Dorothy, if things still stood as they were,’ he said. ‘But they do not ; and any change I am going to make will be the result of another cause. I have some news for you. I am going to leave Sturhampton, and you are the first person to whom I have told the fact. You will not do my parish much more harm, my dear, for in a few weeks at most I shall be without one.’

His back was towards her, and so he could not see the current of grief and trouble that flashed from Dolly’s heart to Dolly’s face. He waited for the eager, happy words of congratulation that should have come ; for the touch at which he should turn to meet the bright, animated face that would smile on him for a moment, and then flit joyfully upstairs to Granny. He waited for these things, wondering if his elevation could bring him any other pleasure to compare with this. And then, instead, he heard behind him a quick, low sob, and turned, with a sinking of the heart, to find the girl crying bitterly, her face cast forward in utter self-abandonment upon her arms, and her whole frame quivering with the sharpness of her sorrow.

His heart sank with a natural foreboding. But surely it must have been a singularly affectionate one, or where otherwise lay hidden the source of that deep feeling which welled up in the simple words wrung from him by the sight of her distress. ‘My darling, my darling, only tell me what it is !’ he cried, stroking her fair hair and striving to comfort her. ‘Tell me your trouble.

Don't you know I would give my life to save you pain, Dolly? Don't hurt me like this, but look up and tell me. What is it, my darling?'

But for a time, though she heard him, she would not be comforted, and his words even seemed to give a fresh impulse to her



grief. At last, amid half-stifled sobs, with her face still hidden, Dolly made him understand what she had heard and what she had feared, and what she had supposed him to mean when he said he was about to leave Stirhampton; and poured out, too, her own self-reproach, while he stood over her and listened, and now touched the bowed head, and now smiled grimly at the rumour of

that unfrocking. And when he came to answer her, he did it in a score of words that dried her eyes effectually, and made her turn her flushed, pitiful, tear-stained face upon him, a glorious smile of pure happiness irradiating it that somehow made his heart leap up like a boy's—and then ache as those deserve to ache who play the boy when old enough to know better.

'It is a mistake,' was all he had said; 'I am leaving here, but not in disgrace, Dolly. I have accepted the Bishopric of the new see of Deringham. What a silly, loving, little girl it is! You may read the letter, my dear.' And while Dolly, in radiant dishevelment, was striving to tell him her pleasure, he took an envelope from his pocket and held it out. Dolly seized it eagerly and opened it, and found within it not at all what the Archdeacon had thought was in it. The envelope contained no statesman's autograph, or courtly to-apron-inviting note from Downing Street, but only a white rose, a dried rose, flattened, but still sweet and fragrant. Almost as soon as the girl's fingers touched it the Archdeacon was aware of his mistake—surely a very curious mistake—and snatched it from her with some confused words and a reddening brow. But Dolly had seen it—had certainly seen it; and somehow it brought back to her memory the day of the curates' race; so that when the Archdeacon brusquely put another letter into her hand, she read it with her eyes, and not her mind. As for the Archdeacon, he sought the window, and hemmed and hawed, and at last said, hastily, without turning, 'There, there, my dear, I think there is no more to be said. Will you kindly go and tell Granny?' and so affected to select a volume from a shelf of the Early Fathers.

But Dorothy did not move. She sat stooping forward, passing the hem of her much-bedabbled handkerchief through her fingers.

'Are you sure that you have told me all you wish to tell me?' she asked, slowly.

Her guardian started. 'I think so,' he answered, and plunged recklessly at a volume of Origen, or it might be St. Anthony, perhaps.

'Then why,' cried Dolly, starting up and facing him, with crimson cheeks, 'why did you call me your darling just now? You had no right to do it—no right, though you are my guardian, to say that—if you are going to say nothing more! If you want me, why don't you ask for me? Philip could, and Mr. Brune, and

the other! I hate a coward. Why cannot you say, if—you—want me?’

There are men who have seen Deans in their shirt-sleeves, playing billiards. And there is one still living—chiefly on the fact—who once was last in a three-legged race in double harness with a Duke. So it is undeniable that great men do unbend at times to a surprising extent. But that the Archdeacon at the point of the story we have reached unbent in the manner much hinted at in Stirhampton, I shall ask no reader to believe. The more as the real facts which have been told fully explain the disorder of lace and neck-ribbon, the softness of eye, and crimson of cheek which Granny noticed about the girl when she ran in upon her, all smiles and tears, knocking down the screen, and hugging the little old lady into a state of deep alarm.

Which took, of course, the old direction. But the Archdeacon came upstairs in time to anticipate the usual question. ‘No,’ he said, putting his hand on the kneeling girl’s head, ‘the balance is all right, Granny—except in years. There is a heavy overdraft of those against me.’

‘And I will honour it,’ said Dolly, gravely, and took his hand and kissed it. As for what followed—we had better put up Granny’s screen again. This the man of system, who had no taste for jests? But then it is just possible that Dolly did not mean it for a jest. The curates? Mr. Philip Emerson, Mr. Brune, and Mr. Bigham? Indeed I cannot say what became of them. I should suppose they died prematurely of broken hearts. But the next time that I visit Deringham I will call at the Palace and ask the Bishop.

BEAUMARCHAIS.

THE author of two comedies which have been for a century among the most popular in the whole range of French dramatic literature was the son of a struggling Paris watchmaker, named Caron. His business was a small and never a very successful one, but the watchmaker himself was a person of considerable scientific attainments, of refined manners, and of cultivated taste. His family consisted of five daughters and one son, Pierre Augustin, who was born on January 24, 1732. The boy's education was principally conducted at home, though for a short time he attended a school at Alfort, where he appears to have shown no marked proficiency. Of his character and pursuits during these early years we get some glimpses in the letters of his sisters. Here he is described as overflowing with fun, frolic, and high animal spirits; the life of the household; always in mischief; no sooner out of one scrape than into another; passionately fond of music, but the reverse of industrious at his scholastic studies. Of course an only boy of this disposition was an object of perfect adoration to a fond mother and five sisters, by whom, accordingly, he was petted and worshipped and spoiled. But fortunately his father was not equally inclined to indulgence, and kept the curb on him pretty tightly. At the age of thirteen he began to learn the art of watch-making, wherein he seems to have soon attained considerable skill. This, however, must have been the result rather of natural quickness and ingenuity than of steady application, for his love of gaiety and amusement was by no means extinguished by the cares of business. At length, after having administered countless ineffectual warnings and reproofs to his son on the subject of his dissipation and neglect of business, M. Caron had recourse to the strong measure of turning the young scapegrace out of doors; taking care, however, to arrange for his reception into the house of an old family friend, through whose mediation a treaty of peace was, after a short time, patched up. The articles were of the most stringent character, and were formally signed by the high contracting parties. The son engaged not to make, sell, or repair anything whatever except on his father's account; to get up at

six o'clock in the summer and at seven in the winter, and to work till supper-time ; to go to no more supper parties ; and when, by special permission, allowed to dine with his friends on Sundays, always to be in by nine o'clock ; and, finally, to give up his music, except the flute and violin, which he was to be permitted to play after supper. On the other hand, his father engaged to allow him his board and eighteen francs a month, and to credit him with a quarter of any business which he might bring in. After this matters went on more smoothly. Pierre Augustin applied himself more steadily to business, with the result that, before reaching his twentieth year, he had invented a new kind of escapement for watches, which was a considerable improvement on any of those previously in use. In his delight at his success and with the generous confidence of youth he showed his invention to a M. Lepaute, a brother-watchmaker, who forthwith wrote a letter to the 'Mercure,' explaining the new principle and claiming it as his own. All the vehement pugnacity of Caron's disposition was aroused by this dishonest conduct of the man whom he had trusted. He immediately replied to Lepaute's letter in the 'Mercure,' and requested the public to suspend its judgment until a decision had been arrived at by the Academy of Sciences, to whose arbitration he had referred the matter. In 1754 the Academy, after mature consideration of the evidence by which the rival claims were supported, emphatically confirmed Caron's title to the invention. This affair brought him into some prominence in his profession, and he received orders for watches on his new principle from the King, Madame de Pompadour, and many of the highest personages about the Court.

One of his customers was a certain Madame Franquet, wife of one of the 'Contrôleurs clercs d'office de la maison du roi,' or clerks of the royal pantry. This lady, who was young and married to a husband considerably older than herself, took a great fancy to the handsome young watchmaker. She introduced him to her husband, with whom, as Caron was longing to relinquish the watch-making business and push his fortunes, and M. Franquet was just as anxious for rest and freedom from his official duties, an arrangement was come to, whereby, in consideration of the payment of an annuity to his predecessor, Caron succeeded to the clerkship. M. Franquet did not survive his retirement many months, and on his death Caron married the widow. His happiness was not, however, of long duration, for in less than a year

after the marriage the lady died of typhus fever. This was a severe blow not only to his affections but to his worldly fortunes, as all that he was able to retain of his wife's property was the empty title of Beaumarchais, which, in the year 1757, he had assumed from a small fief belonging to her. All the actual property reverted to her relations, and Caron was left dependent solely on the meagre income of his Court appointment.

Among the customers whom Caron, or, as we must now call him, Beaumarchais, had supplied with watches were the daughters of Louis XV., Mesdames Victoire, Adelaïde, Sophie, and Louise. The princesses were much taken with his manners and appearance, and, on learning that he was skilled in the management of the harp, desired to take lessons from him. Here was indeed an opportunity to push his fortune at Court. He entered heartily into the scheme, and used all his endeavours to ingratiate himself with his royal pupils. Carefully repudiating the position of a mere paid music-master, he would receive no remuneration for his services, and often incurred considerable expense in purchasing instruments and music for which he was not very promptly repaid. He soon became the chief director and performer at the weekly concerts given by the princesses, which were attended by the King, the Queen, the Dauphin, and a few favoured courtiers. He was thus brought into close contact with all the members of the royal family and soon came to be regarded by them as a privileged individual; so much so that on one occasion the King, wishing to hear him play the harp, obliged him to sit down in the royal chair; and that the Dauphin, whose frank, blunt disposition Beaumarchais respected and appreciated, used to say, 'He is the only person who speaks the truth to me.' Such a high degree of favour shown to one who had so recently occupied a very humble position naturally excited much ill-feeling and brought down on Beaumarchais all sorts of insults from the jealous courtiers. He was perpetually being annoyed by covert sneers at his lowly origin and connection with trade, and on one occasion, as he was leaving the royal apartments, a nobleman insultingly asked him to repair a watch that had stopped. Beaumarchais politely replied that it was a long time since he had given up all work of that kind, and that he had consequently lost his skill. When, however, the other continued to press the matter, he took the watch, which was a very valuable one, and opening it as if to examine the works, let it fall. Turning to the disconcerted nobleman he

said, 'I warned you, sir, that I was now very unskilful,' and, with a bow, walked off. He at length found it necessary to have recourse to strong measures in order to put a stop to the frequent insults to which he was subjected, and he challenged one of his tormentors. The duel took place at Meudon, without seconds, and Beaumarchais wounded his opponent mortally. This might have been a very serious matter, for victor as well as for vanquished, but for the generosity of the dying man, who, during the few days he survived, firmly refused to disclose the name of his antagonist.

After having made himself useful to the princesses for some years without reward, Beaumarchais at last found an opportunity of turning his Court favour to profitable account. Paris du Verney, one of the four brothers who, sprung from a very humble origin, played such a prominent part in the financial affairs of France during the greater portion of the eighteenth century, had determined to immortalise his name by connecting it with a national institution for the education of officers for the French army. He had interested Madame de Pompadour in the scheme, and had obtained the King's sanction for the erection of the building which at present adorns the Champ de Mars. In 1760, however, the credit at Court both of the mistress and the financier was at a low ebb; the buildings were still uncompleted; and, though the establishment contained a few students, it was in a languishing and unsatisfactory condition. In order to add prestige and attract pupils to the college Du Verney had for some time been using every means in his power to induce the King to visit it in state, but he had never as yet been able to attain this favour. It now occurred to him that it might be possible to compass his end through the medium of the princesses' young *protégé*. He sounded Beaumarchais on the subject, who was only too delighted to be of use to a man who had such facilities for returning a kindness. The princesses made no difficulty about granting the only favour which Beaumarchais had yet asked of them and readily consented to pay a visit to the college. This they did, and so favourably did they report on what they saw that soon after Louis XV. followed their example. Du Verney was not ungrateful. He set about making the fortune of Beaumarchais, as many years before he had made the fortune of Voltaire. He gave him a share in several lucrative contracts and other commercial speculations. He lent him money and assisted him with advice. The son of

the watchmaker was rising fast in the world, and now began to think of adding to his name the magic monosyllable which is the hall-mark of French nobility. With this object he purchased the place of King's secretary, which carried with it the right of prefixing to his name the much-coveted 'De.' He then entered into treaty for a more important place—one of the rangerships of the rivers and forests; but here he met with a violent opposition from the other rangers, who objected to his admission on the ground of his humble origin. This opposition was successful, although in his plea for himself Beaumarchais showed that, of these haughty nobles who were so afraid of being contaminated by association with the son of a watchmaker, one was the son of a hairdresser, another of a wool-winder, another of a button-maker, and another of a Jew dealer in second-hand jewellery. Besides thus exposing the absurdity of such an objection to his appointment coming from such opponents, he gave a flat contradiction to the statement that he was not noble. 'I am a noble,' he said, with a consummate impudence worthy of Figaro himself; 'I can prove it, for I have the receipt!' However, to compensate for this disappointment he purchased, in 1763, the important place of Lieutenant-general of the Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre, which he continued to hold until 1785. His duties in this office consisted in presiding over the tribunal specially appointed to deal with offences against the game laws throughout a space of some fifteen leagues around Paris over which the King enjoyed the sole sporting rights.

In 1764 Beaumarchais made a journey to Madrid, where he stayed over a year. The object of this expedition was to avenge an affront which had been offered to one of his sisters, who during a residence in the Spanish capital had become engaged to a young Spaniard named Joseph Clavijo. This gentleman, after the engagement had lasted some time, suddenly repudiated it. But the lady's friends were not people to see her wronged with impunity. Her brother instantly set out for Madrid, and after forcing the fickle lover to sue for a renewal of the engagement, contrived to have him turned out of a place which he held under the government and expelled from the Court. Mlle. Caron, probably disgusted with the ways of Spanish suitors, married one of her own countrymen.

This little domestic affair being satisfactorily settled, Beaumarchais turned his attention to other matters. He was now fairly

launched in a career of gigantic mercantile speculation, and had determined to turn his Spanish visit to account. Du Verney furnished him with a sum of 200,000 francs and with letters of introduction to several of the most influential personages in the country. His plans were on the grandest scale, including such projects as the acquisition of a concession of the sole right of trading with Louisiana and of supplying the Spanish colonies with negroes; a scheme for the colonisation of the Sierra Morena; and a contract for furnishing the Spanish army with provisions. However, all these magnificent conceptions proved veritable 'Châteaux en Espagne,' as none of them came to maturity, though the negotiations for the last were, at one time, very nearly being successful. In the intervals of business Beaumarchais plunged into all the gaieties of the Spanish capital. He obtained entrance into the best society and soon became the most popular man in Madrid. He took part in concerts and amateur theatricals, wrote words to the national seguidillas, and possessed an inexhaustible flow of sparkling and witty conversation. After more than a year's stay in Spain he returned to Paris, leaving behind him a reputation for brilliant talents and amiable social qualities.

We now come to another phase in this busy life. Hitherto we have seen Beaumarchais as the schoolboy, the apprentice, the courtier, the speculator, and the man of fashion. We are now to witness his entrance upon that literary career by his success in which his name has been preserved to posterity. In 1767 he brought out 'Eugénie,' a drama whereof the scene is laid in England and the plot hinges upon a sham marriage. It is a very mediocre performance and contains little of the sparkling wit which distinguishes its author's later works. However, it had for a time a fair share of success and was even taken as the groundwork of an English play—'The School for Rakes'—in which Garrick sustained the leading part.

Encouraged by the success of this venture Beaumarchais followed it up in 1770 with 'Les deux Amis,' a play of a similar character, but which did not meet with the good fortune of its predecessor and was effectually and deservedly damned. Nevertheless, if not witty in itself, the piece was certainly the cause of wit in others, for it provoked quite a storm of bons mots, epigrams, and satirical verses. Some wag, who probably bore a grudge against Beaumarchais, wrote on the bill announcing the representation of 'Les deux Amis,' 'Par un auteur qui n'en a aucun,

and during the performance of the play, whose plot derives its chief interest from the difficulties of a merchant on the verge of bankruptcy, one of the 'gods' shouted out, 'Il s'agit ici d'une banqueroute; j'y suis pour mes vingt sous,' that being the price of admission to the theatre. The following verses, too, had a considerable circulation and could hardly have afforded pleasant reading to the unfortunate author:—

J'ai vu de Beaumarchais le drame ridicule,
Et vais, en un mot, vous dire ce que c'est :
C'est un change où l'argent circule,
Sans produire aucun intérêt.

In the interval between these two literary ventures Beaumarchais married a second time. Again he chose a widow, a certain Madame l'Evêque, who brought him a large fortune. But his married life in this, as in the former case, was destined to be of but brief duration. His wife died in childbed within three years of the marriage. She left a son, who soon followed her to the grave. As a large portion of her fortune consisted in an annuity, the widower lost the benefit of it; but this was not of so much consequence to him at the time, as he was making large sums of money from the sale of timber from the forest of Chinon, which, in partnership with Du Verney, he had purchased from the State. In spite, however, of this successful speculation the year 1770 was an unfortunate one for Beaumarchais; as in January he brought out his unsuccessful play, in November he lost his wife, and in July Du Verney died at the age of eighty-seven. The old financier left the whole of his fortune of about a million and a half of francs to his grand nephew, the Count de la Blache, between whom and Beaumarchais there had long been a bitter enmity. In April 1770 a settlement of affairs had taken place between Du Verney and Beaumarchais, and a formal document, signed by both parties, had been drawn up, regulating the transactions between them. By this agreement Beaumarchais returned bills to the amount of 160,000 francs to Du Verney, who, on his part, withdrew from the partnership in the forest of Chinon, acknowledged that he was indebted to his partner in the sum of 15,000 francs, and engaged to lend him 75,000 francs for eight years without interest. At Du Verney's death the two last items were still unsettled and his heir at once determined to contest the matter. A long series of legal proceedings ensued, which lasted with varying results during eight years. Finally, in 1773, after gaining his case in the first instance

and afterwards losing it on appeal, Beaumarchais obtained a decision in his favour on all the points of his claim.

During the course of this long litigation, however, the warfare was by no means confined to the courts of law. The advocate of the Count de la Blache bespattered the defendant with the most vehement abuse, insinuating that he had forged the agreement with Du Verney and had swindled the old man in every way; and these accusations were industriously spread abroad in every direction by pamphleteers and other writers whom the Count employed, and who added various pleasant little fictions drawn from their own fertile imaginations. Of these stories the one most frequently and most confidently asserted and reasserted was to the effect that Beaumarchais had poisoned both his wives.

During the progress of the second of his law-suits with the Count de la Blache, Beaumarchais had the bad fortune to be sent to 'For-l'Evêque' as a punishment for a fracas in which he was involved with the Duc de Chaulnes on account of an actress who, after living under the Duke's protection, had betrayed a preference for his rival. Beaumarchais' confinement lasted two months and a half, but he was allowed to go out during the day-time in the charge of a police agent to conduct his law-suit. This, however, the first of the appeals in the La Blache case, was decided against Beaumarchais in April 1773. The matter had been remitted to a councillor of the Parliament named Goëzman, and, on his report, the decision of the court below was overruled and judgment given in favour of the Count for 56,300 livres with interest for five years and costs. This was a crushing blow; for, besides the actual loss in money which he suffered, Beaumarchais was indirectly branded with the ignominy of having tampered with, if not absolutely forged, the agreement with Du Verney. The Count seized his goods; and, to crown his misfortunes, he now became involved in another and still more serious law-suit which originated from the following circumstances. The councillor, Goëzman, who had been appointed to report to the Parliament on the action between Beaumarchais and the Count de la Blache, was an elderly man married to a young wife. The lady had somewhat extravagant tastes, but unfortunately her husband's income was not a large one. In order to make both ends meet she was in the habit of accepting presents from the suitors who wished to procure favourable reports on their cases from the husband. Beaumarchais had endeavoured to propitiate the judge through his wife, to whom he presented 100

louis and a watch set with diamonds. It was agreed that these presents were to be returned should an unfavourable judgment be pronounced. Madame Goëzman afterwards demanded an additional fifteen louis for her husband's secretary; and this sum also was given her, without, however, in this case any stipulation as to its return.

If the defendant's terms were liberal, the plaintiff's, to judge by the result, must have been lavish. The councillor's report and consequently the judgment were, as already stated, unfavourable to Beaumarchais, and Madame Goëzman at once returned the 100 louis and the watch. This done, she probably considered that she had played her part in the little drama in strict accordance with the most rigid rules of morality and honourable dealing. As to restoring the other fifteen louis she would probably have asked with Shylock, 'Is it so nominated in the bond?' Unfortunately, however, the other party to the transaction was in that position in which as a rule a man does not recognise that 'the pleasure is as great of being cheated as to cheat.' He was irritated at the loss of his suit, and, suspecting that he had been duped, he had what Madame Goëzman doubtless considered the impertinent curiosity to inquire of the secretary as to what had become of the fifteen louis. The result of his inquiries proved how well grounded was his suspicion that the money had never reached its destination in the pocket of the secretary but had remained in that of the lady. He instantly demanded its return. Madame Goëzman was naturally much disgusted at the bad taste shown in such a demand, and not only denied the receipt of the fifteen louis, but, on the strength of having returned the other presents, complained to her husband that Beaumarchais had offered her a bribe which she had indignantly refused. Goëzman brought before the Parliament a criminal action against Beaumarchais for libelling a councillor's wife. The proceedings took place with closed doors, before a tribunal of which the plaintiff was himself a member, and which was strongly biassed against the defendant.

In order to understand the extraordinary amount of interest which this trial excited it is necessary to be acquainted with certain facts connected with the Parliament of which Goëzman was a member. During the greater part of the reign of Louis XV. a violent struggle for power had been going on between the Crown and the Parliaments. The incidents were almost invariably the same in each fresh dispute. The Crown issued an ordinance; the

Parliament refused to register it the members were summoned to a 'Lit de Justice' presided over by the King in person, and were ordered to register; they protested and suspended their judicial functions, thereby throwing the whole country into confusion. If they continued obstinate they were exiled. Finally some concessions were made on both sides and the members were reinstated. At last, in 1770, the Chancellor, Maupeou, took the extreme course of confiscating the offices, all of which had been obtained by purchase and were supposed to be held for life, of the members of the Parliament of Paris, and of constructing a new Parliament out of different materials. Public sympathy was on the side of the old Parliament in the struggle and, in substantiating a charge of bribery against a member of the new one, Beaumarchais was regarded as a man who was maintaining a gallant fight against a corrupt and unpopular institution. The inquiry was conducted with closed doors, but the real battle took place outside; for, knowing that the tribunal before which his case was on trial was unfavourable to him, Beaumarchais determined to appeal to the public. He therefore published in the form of a pamphlet the memorial in which he had set forth for the consideration of the court the facts connected with the case. This document instantly attracted attention, not merely from the interest of the matter itself, but from the sparkle and brilliancy of the style in which it was written. A host of eager combatants at once took up the gage of battle thus thrown down. Pamphlet after pamphlet appeared in answer to the memorial—all teeming with the most virulent abuse of Beaumarchais—raking up and misrepresenting the incidents of his private life, and accusing him of having poisoned his wives, cheated Du Verney, and 'belied a lady.' Nothing daunted, he defended himself gallantly against his numerous assailants with all the most deadly weapons in the controversial armoury, from delicate irony to slashing sarcasm. In the four other memorials which he issued at intervals, Goëzman and all his aiders and abettors were covered with ridicule and contempt. All Paris read and laughed. Like Byron, Beaumarchais woke to find himself famous. In April 1773 his fortunes had been at the lowest possible ebb. He was known only as a man of pleasing manners in society, as a speculator, or as the writer of a couple of very poor plays; he had just lost a law-suit, by which he was completely ruined in his fortune and seriously compromised in his honour; he was in prison on account of a not

very creditable squabble about an actress. By the end of the same year he was the most popular man in France.

The sentence of the Parliament was pronounced on February 6, 1774. The penalty in the case of Beaumarchais was that of 'blâme,' or civil degradation, which debarred him from all the ordinary rights and duties of citizenship. On Madame Goëzman a similar punishment was inflicted and she was ordered to restore the fifteen louis, which were to be distributed to the poor. Goëzman himself had to resign his office. In order to complete the sentence it should have been pronounced on Beaumarchais in open court, where he should have been declared 'infamous' by the President. But this was an extreme to which his popularity rendered it impossible for the Parliament to proceed and it was not enforced. On the morning following the judgment all Paris called on him. Instead of a humiliation the result of the trial was a brilliant triumph.

Nevertheless he was left in a very uncomfortable position and felt it a serious necessity to get the sentence annulled. Luckily, just at this juncture, fortune threw in his way the means of making himself useful to the King, who promised in return to afford him protection and to extend the time during which he could bring an appeal. The matter happened in this wise. A person named Théveneau de Morande was carrying on in London a profitable trade in libels on prominent persons in France; his plan being to extort blackmail from his victims for the suppression of the calumnies which he threatened to publish. His last effort in this peculiar branch of literature had taken the form of a series of highly-spiced anecdotes concerning Madame du Barri, under the title of '*Mémoires secrets d'une femme publique.*' Three thousand copies of this interesting work had been printed, and both Louis XV. and the lady were particularly anxious that the publication should be suppressed. The King suggested that Beaumarchais should go over to London and negotiate with Morande on the subject. His mission was successful, but his run of bad luck was not yet exhausted, as, when he returned to France expecting to reap his reward, he found the King dying. However, the trade in libels was a flourishing one and his services were soon again called into requisition. This time it was a Jew, named Angelucci, who had printed two large editions of a libel on the new queen, Marie Antoinette, one in London and another in Amsterdam. Beaumarchais soon came to terms with him and,

after destroying the English, proceeded to Holland to destroy the Dutch edition. When this was done, however, he found to his dismay that the wily Israelite had kept back one copy and, with it and the money he had received from Beaumarchais, had set out for Nuremberg, with the intention of bringing out a new edition there. In hot haste and with threats of direst vengeance Beaumarchais followed in pursuit. He came up with Angelucci in a forest a short distance from Nuremberg, seized him and secured the precious volume, but, when returning to his post-chaise, he was himself attacked by two robbers, who demanded his money and, on meeting with a refusal, set upon him with their knives. Beaumarchais made a gallant resistance, but was wounded and would have been killed had not his enemies taken to flight on the approach of the servants and postillion. He now proceeded to Vienna with the object of procuring an order for the arrest of Angelucci, and contrived to obtain an interview with the empress, Maria Theresa, but his story was thought so improbable that he was detained until information as to the truth of his statements was received from France. On his release he was offered a thousand ducats as compensation for the inconvenience he had suffered, but he contemptuously rejected the offer and set off for France in a state of great indignation.

This was by no means the last of Beaumarchais' efforts in the character of a secret agent, for we soon find him engaged in a still more strange affair. The negotiation which he now undertook was with no less a personage than the celebrated Chevalier d'Eon. This extraordinary individual had commenced his career as an advocate; had then exchanged the gown for the sword and served in the army with considerable distinction; and finally, turning his attention to diplomacy, had, after being employed in missions to Russia and Austria, come to London in 1761 as Secretary of Embassy, from which post he had been promoted to that of Minister Plenipotentiary. His services had been rewarded with the Cross of St. Louis. So far his career had been distinguished, but by no means remarkable. Now, however, an extraordinary rumour had spread throughout London society to the effect that D'Eon was a woman. The excitement which the report naturally produced was kept alive by the persistence with which he himself declined to impart any information, and the studied mystery with which he spoke on the subject. D'Eon evidently rejoiced in and did everything in his power to maintain

the notoriety he had acquired, and large sums were betted on the question of his sex. During his residence in London he had lived very extravagantly and contracted debts to a large amount, and he was now trying to extort money from the French Government by threatening to dispose of certain important political papers in his possession. Beaumarchais undertook the negotiation on the part of the Court, and managed to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. D'Eon was contented with a much smaller sum than he had at first demanded for the delivery of the documents, and agreed to assume the dress of what was believed to be his real sex. He accordingly wore petticoats during the remaining thirty years of his life, although an examination of his body after his death in 1810 showed that he was actually a man.

By this last service Beaumarchais had well earned the reward for which he had worked so energetically. The Maupeou Parliament had been dissolved in the beginning of the new reign, and the old Parliament restored, from which, in September, 1776, he obtained a reversal of his sentence and the restoration of his civil rights.

In the year 1772, Beaumarchais had composed both the words and the music of a comic opera—'Le Barbier de Seville'—which was refused by the Comédie Italienne. He then entirely remodelled his work, transformed it into a comedy, and offered it to the Théâtre Français. Several unfortunate accidents, however, delayed the production of the play for some years. All the preparations for its representation were complete in February 1773, when Beaumarchais was sent to For-l'Evêque in consequence of the quarrel with the Duc de Chaulnes. At another time it had to be deferred owing to the Goëzman lawsuit, and, on a third occasion, shortly before the day fixed for the first performance, an order was received prohibiting the play, as a report had been spread that it was full of political allusion. However, on February 23, 1775, the piece was produced and—hissed! No one had a word of praise for it. The disappointment was excessive, as, from the author of the celebrated 'Memorials,' so much had been expected. But it was always in the most disadvantageous circumstances that the marvellous elasticity and energy of Beaumarchais' character were peculiarly conspicuous. The piece was damned on Friday night and all Paris was talking of the author's miserable failure. On the Sunday it was played a second time and elicited rapturous applause. In the interval

it had been entirely remodelled ; scenes transposed ; compressed from five acts into four ; and the whole of the dialogue revised and improved. From that day to this there has never again been a question as to its popularity on the stage.

Beaumarchais was certainly not an ill-natured man, but by some unfortunate fatality his whole life was a series of quarrels ; and even the brilliant success of his comedy led to a war with the actors of the Théâtre Français. By the rules of the company the remuneration of the authors of the pieces played by them was fixed at one-ninth of the net receipts ; but if on any one night the receipts fell below a certain sum, the play became the absolute property of the company, and the author lost all further right and title to it. This system was palpably unfair, and Beaumarchais determined to put an end to it. He united the isolated and generally antagonistic dramatic authors in a society for the protection of their rights, and carried on for many years a spirited warfare with the Théâtre Français. His efforts were at length crowned with victory, and he lived to see the obnoxious privileges of the company abolished.

It would have been thought that with quarrels and law-suits, secret missions and plays, Beaumarchais' hands were now pretty full and even his superabundant energy taxed to the utmost, but it was not so ; for in June 1776 he embarked in an enterprise of gigantic commercial proportions and considerable political importance. During his various visits to London he had taken great interest in the quarrel between England and her North American Colonies, and, when it assumed serious proportions, he began to urge upon the French King and his Ministers the advisability of assisting the Americans with money or warlike materials. The relations between England and France were at this time by no means cordial, and the French Ministers at length determined to adopt Beaumarchais' advice. As they had no wish, however, to come to an open rupture with England, they hit upon a plan of sending their assistance to the Americans in such a manner as not to compromise themselves. In the course of the years 1776 and 1777 the French Government supplied Beaumarchais with two millions and the Spanish Government with one million of francs ; wherewith he founded the mercantile house of Roderigue, Hortalez and Co., for the purpose of providing the Americans with arms, ammunition, and all the other articles of which they were at the time in extreme need. He was to

receive in exchange American products—principally tobacco. He was to be allowed to purchase his stores from the French arsenals, but this was to be done secretly and every precaution was to be taken to avoid arousing suspicion in the mind of the English Ambassador as to the firm being anything more than an ordinary trading company. The first consignment consisted of two hundred cannons, twenty-five thousand guns, two hundred thousand pounds of powder, and clothing and tents for twenty-five thousand men. There were also between forty and fifty engineer and artillery officers, whom Beaumarchais had enlisted for the American service. The expedition sailed early in 1777, and, escaping the English cruisers, arrived safely at its destination, to the great joy of the Americans. Many other ships followed, and in a short time the Americans were indebted to the house of Roderigue, Hortalez and Co. for a very large amount. This was due to the fact that, instead of returning American produce in exchange for the consignments of arms received as originally agreed upon, the colonists sent the ships back empty; for they persisted in regarding the firm, not as a genuine trading company, but merely as an agent for distributing the gifts of the French Government. All Beaumarchais' remonstrances were in vain. After a long time one or two small remittances were sent, but these were out of all proportion to the amount of the indebtedness, and the credit of the firm was only supported by the profit on transactions with more honest customers, and by grants made from time to time by the French treasury. Throughout all the remaining years of his life Beaumarchais continued to urge his claims on the American Government, but it was not until the year 1835, long after his death, that the account was finally settled by the payment to his heirs of the sum of eight hundred thousand francs, which was but a very small portion of the actual amount of the debt.

In the midst of all his multifarious labours Beaumarchais had found time to write another comedy. The vein which he had worked with such success in 'Le Barbier de Seville' was not yet exhausted. 'Le Mariage de Figaro' was offered to and accepted by the Théâtre Français in 1781, and, unlike continuations in general, was even more rapturously applauded than its predecessor. It was not, however, till after a long and hard struggle that the necessary permission for its representation was obtained. The piece was studded with the boldest political allusions, and scattered ridicule broadcast over all existing institutions. The Church, the

magistracy, and even the Crown itself were made the subjects of unsparing raillery. It was not likely that a play of this kind would be readily sanctioned in a country where a strict censorship of the press existed, and where the most persistent opponent was the King himself. Madame Campan, in her 'Memoirs,' lets us into the secret of this opposition. 'One evening,' she says, 'I received a note from the Queen, telling me to be with her at three o'clock, and not to come without having dined, as she would keep me a long time. When I arrived I found her Majesty with the King in her inner cabinet; a seat and a little table were already placed before them, and on the table was an enormous manuscript. The King said to me: "It is Beaumarchais' comedy which you are to read to us. I have already looked through it, but I want the Queen to know the work. You will not speak to any one of this reading." I began; the King often interrupted me with exclamations, always just, either of praise or blame. Most frequently he cried out: "It's bad taste. The man is continually bringing on the scene the Italian 'congetti.'" At the monologue of Figaro, wherein he attacks the different parties in the administration, but especially at the tirade on the prisons, the King sprang up and said: "That's detestable! that shall never be played. It would be necessary to destroy the Bastile, to do away with the dangerous inconsistency of the piece: the man mocks at everything that ought to be respected in a government." "Then it will not be played?" said the Queen. "No, certainly," replied Louis XVI., "you may be sure of that."

Such was the King's fixed resolve, and as he was, at all events in theory, an autocrat, it would seem to present an insuperable obstacle. On the other hand, however, was brought to bear a pressure which in the end proved too strong to be resisted by the will of one man, however obstinate, or however powerful. Beaumarchais possessed unexampled skill in forming public opinion and employing it as a lever for the accomplishment of his own purposes. For nearly three years he laboured indefatigably to arouse in all the ranks of society an ardent curiosity to see his new work brought on to the stage. He gave numberless readings at the houses of the most influential persons, 'so that,' says Madame Campan, 'every day one heard people say, "I was present," or "I am going to be present at the reading of Beaumarchais' piece."' He used all the influence which he had acquired from the success of his writings, from his wealth, from his extensive

connections, and from the delicacy of the missions in which he had been engaged on behalf of the Court, to overcome the obstacles in his path. The King and Queen were besieged with solicitations from all sides. Several times he was on the point of succeeding. In June 1782 the piece was actually announced for representation, tickets were distributed, the theatre was half filled with an eager crowd, and it was only at the last moment that an order was received under the King's hand forbidding the performance. In September 1783 the play was privately acted by permission before the Count d'Artois and a brilliant audience at the country house of the Count de Vaudreuil; and at last, in the March following, the resistance of the King was broken down and the first public representation took place at the Théâtre Français. The crush was terrific, and several persons were suffocated at the doors of the theatre.

The high expectations which had been formed of the play were not disappointed. It was a brilliant success at the time and has retained its popularity down to the present day; though, curiously enough, both this and Beaumarchais' previous comedy—'Le Barbier de Seville'—have been restored to the operatic form in which they were originally intended to appear, Mozart and Rossini having supplied music of a very different class from any that the author's own skill could ever have produced.

This was the culminating point in Beaumarchais' career. His unwearied industry and perseverance had won for him no small share of fortune's favours. All Paris crowded to the theatre to listen to his comedy and to overwhelm the author with applause. His society was eagerly courted, he was happy in his domestic relations, his wealth was great and apparently rested on an assured foundation. He was largely blessed with fortune, friends, and fame. But from this time his undertakings were not so uniformly crowned with success as heretofore, and during the remaining years of his life he gradually but surely declined in happiness and prosperity. Perhaps with advancing years there was some little loss of energy; though, even to the last, any falling off in this respect was hardly perceptible, and he was as ready as ever to engage in any new enterprise, or to rush into the midst of a fight whether the matter in dispute concerned him or not. But it seemed as if Fortune had determined to bestow no more of her gifts upon him. He produced two more plays, both of which were comparative failures and have sunk into well-deserved

oblivion ; he was thrown into prison on a false charge of having uttered words disrespectful to the King ; he was engaged in a law-suit in which another person played the popular part which he himself had enacted in connection with the Goëzman case ; and he launched into an unfortunate speculation to supply the Revolutionary Government of France with guns, which involved him in innumerable difficulties and dangers. He was imprisoned, exiled, deprived of his property and reduced to extreme distress ; but he never lost his courage or his natural gaiety, nor ever ceased to maintain a gallant struggle against 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' Singularly in contrast with the restless activity of this busy life was the calm of its closing scene. There was no long and weary combat with disease or decay. Peacefully and unexpectedly Beaumarchais passed away in the night and was found dead in his bed on the morning of the 18th of May 1799.

SOME LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS.

IX.

I WAS thirty-two years of age, and had written many books and a very large number of miscellaneous articles, before I made my first success in literature. I had advanced, I think, as regards the art of story-telling, and certainly in public favour, but only in a moderate way. There had been no 'leaps and bounds' in my progress; but the appearance of 'Lost Sir Massingberd' was an epoch in my literary life. The idea (as I have mentioned elsewhere) occurred to me on the top of a coach; and it was the best day's journey I ever took. The story appeared, of course, in the 'Journal,' and very largely increased its circulation. Its proprietors—for in such a case it would be ungenerous to dissociate them—behaved with great liberality to me. I mention the matter (though some may consider it a private one) not only because it reflects credit on the firm in question, but because it casts some light on the relation between publishers and authors generally. There is a notion abroad that the latter are almost invariably the victims of the former, and that, while Justice has but a legal foothold in Paternoster Row, Generosity has none at all. My experience, which on such matters is probably as large as that of any man alive, is to the contrary of all this. There are 'bad publishers of course, skinflints ('scaly varmints,' as a cab-driver once called a friend of mine, who was so delighted with the term that he at once gave him half-a-sovereign), but in what other profession are such characters unknown? I have met with some sharp practice with publishers myself, and have never hesitated to say so, or to give piquancy to the narrative by the disclosure of their names; but such experiences have been quite exceptional. Upon the whole I am convinced that I have been handsomely treated.

Talking of this subject upon one occasion with a brother novelist, he gave me the following extract from his literary notebook. 'My first work,' he said, 'was published by Blank & Co., who gave me a decent sum for the first edition, not one half of which was sold. When I became popular I disposed of the copy-

right of the volume elsewhere, and feeling indebted to them for their liberality, and also sorry for their loss, I sent them half the money I received for the book. You never saw such a letter as Blank sent me. One would have thought I had given him a fortune instead of only a small portion of what I had lost him. He could not have expressed more astonishment if it had dropped from the clouds.' I have no doubt Mr. Blank was very much astonished. And yet it is far from uncommon for publishers to give very considerable sums to successful authors beyond what they have bargained for. Of course it may be urged—for there are some people who never will give the devil his due—that this has been done as a retaining fee in order to keep their clients. I can only say that I have known cases where such a motive could not possibly have been imputed, and as they have happened—among others—to myself, I may venture to be quite positive upon the point.

While upon the subject of publishers, I will narrate a story told me by one of that useful and innocuous class called Readers. He was in the great house of Paternoster, Row and Co., but (one cannot but think fortunately for him) Row was dead. One day my friend received one of those charming *brochures* so common nowadays, full of ill-natured gossip about literature and its disciples. Among other disagreeable things, it said that that eminently successful work 'Disloyala: or the Doubtful Priest,' which had run through fifty editions, had been rejected by his house, some years ago. He showed this libel with much indignation to his friend and employer, Mr. Paternoster.

'Is not this,' he cried, 'an infamous statement?'

'What *does* it matter?' was the quiet reply; 'this sort of gentleman will say anything.'

'But I really can't stand it,' persisted the Reader. 'It is a gross libel upon us both, but especially upon me; I shall write to the man and give him a piece of my mind.'

'I wouldn't do that if I were you,' said Mr. Paternoster, still more quietly than before.

'But why not? I really must—.'

There was a twinkle in Mr. Paternoster's eye, and a smile at the extreme corners of his mouth, which attracted the other's attention, and interrupted his eloquence.

'Is there any reason why I should not contradict this man?'

'Well yes, the fact is we did reject the book.'

‘What? Do you mean to say I rejected “Disloyala?”’

‘I am afraid so; at all events we did it amongst us. I don’t blame you; I think it even now a dullish book.’

‘And you never told me? Never let fall a word of it all these years?’

‘Certainly not. I thought it might distress you. I should not have told you now, but that I was taken unawares.’

This to my mind is one of the prettiest stories I have ever heard. I should like to see the General who could be equally reticent, when the Chief of his Intelligence Department had omitted a precaution that would have secured him a victory; or the Solicitor who had lost his cause through the neglect of his Counsel; or the Politician who had missed his point in the House through the shortcoming of his Secretary. Yet Mr. Paternoster was a publisher, one of that fraternity who, if we are to believe some people, are incapable of a generosity. For my part (who have collected a considerable number of anecdotes of the human race) I have never heard a more creditable story, even of a Divine.

Dissatisfaction with honest publishers indeed rarely takes place, except with very young authors. These have great confidence in their own work, and when it does not succeed are prone to blame everybody but themselves. But the fact is, even if a new book is a good book it is very rarely successful. To make it known to the public requires advertising, and that process is expensive, and soon swallows up a small profit, even if profit is made. Upon the whole it behoves the young author to look upon his first venture as itself an advertisement, and not reckon to make his fortune by it. And yet if it be successful, even if it does not ‘pay’ (for the things are quite compatible), it may really make his fortune; for it paves the way (although not with gold) for its successor. My own experience of this matter has been already narrated. I had very good reason to be satisfied with my first production, though it was a pecuniary loss. On the other hand I did not achieve by it any sudden reputation.

‘Lost Sir Massingberd’ was, I think, my fourth book; from that time my position as a story-writer was secure, and I began to receive considerable sums for my books. Even then, however, my progress, though always upward, was slow, and it must have been at least ten years before I reached those ‘four figures’ which are supposed in the literary market to indicate the position of the ‘popular author.’ After that, things bettered with me, and

much more rapidly; but what a beggarly account do the profits of literature present beside those of successful men at the bar, in medicine, or in trade! The most popular novelist alive does not realise per annum what is every year pocketed by a second-rate barrister, or a physician in moderate practice. His term of prosperity is also shorter, for the gift of imagination generally fails us long before those talents which are sufficient for ordinary intellectual toil. And yet nothing is more common than to hear otherwise sensible people talk of the large incomes made by popular writers.

Trollope and Scott were exceptionally quick workers, but there are few men who can write a three-volume novel, worth reading, under nine months; in the same time a popular painter can produce at least three pictures, for each of which he gets as large a sum as the popular writer for his entire book. Nor does his work take out of the artist as it does out of the author. Indeed, if a man looks for wealth, the profession of literature is the very last I would recommend him to embrace. On the other hand, such guerdon as the novelist does receive is gained very pleasantly and accompanied by many charming circumstances. He can choose his society where he likes, for all doors are open to him. If fool enough to prefer swelldom to comfort, he has no need to struggle for it, as men in other callings with ten times his income must needs do. At the tables of the great he is not placed according to the degrees of rank (or Heaven knows where he would be), but enjoys a status of his own. In ordinary society, too (which is much more 'particular' than the 'best circles'), he is regarded with an exceptional charity. His position, indeed, among the most respectable people always reminds me of a lunatic among the Indians: 'the Great Spirit' has afflicted him with genius they think (or at all events with something of that nature), and it behoves them to wink at his little infirmities. Nobody dreams of asking whether he is High Church, or Low Church, or even No Church. However much he may be 'at his ease in Zion,' nobody accuses him of irreverence. It has been said of a certain personage that a great many more people know T. F—— than T. F—— knows; but the number of people who want to know your popular novelist is almost incredible. His photograph is sighed for by literary maidens beyond the seas, and by professional photographers (who take him for nothing) at home; his autograph is demanded from some quarter of the

world by every post. Poems are written on him, books are dedicated to him, paragraphs about his failing health (often when he is quite well, which makes it the more pleasant) pervade the newspapers, as though he were a bishop who gives hopes of a vacant see. If vanity is his ruling passion (a circumstance not altogether unprecedented), he should indeed be a happy man.

What, however, he is really to be congratulated upon is his work itself, which, always delightful to him, can be pursued anywhere and at any time; he is tied to no place, and can take holiday when and where he will; while above all, the nature of his occupation brings him into connection with the pleasantest and brightest people. In this last respect, if in no other—for my little book, though a successful story, made no great noise in the world—I had reason to be grateful to 'Lost Sir Massingberd.' It attracted the attention of some of my masters in the art of fiction, and among them that of my friend Wilkie Collins. He has probably long forgotten the gracious words which he bestowed upon it, but I remember them as though they were spoken yesterday instead of twenty years ago. Accustomed as was the author of 'The Moonstone' to strike at the root of a mystery, he told me that he could not guess what had become of my missing baronet—in which lies what dramatic interest the book possesses—till he came on the page that told him. My old friend at 'The Knoll' of course wrote to congratulate me, though my story, she said, was far too exciting for her, and in her failing health had given her more discomfort than pleasure; and Dickens touched my trembling ears with praise. What was really remarkable about the book was that I had, of course unconsciously, taken for the name of my hero the very name (Massingberd) of a gentleman who had been missing for years, and to this day (I believe) has never been heard of by his friends.

Among those in another sphere of life with whom literature has brought me into connection, was the late lamented Duke of Albany. Years ago, long before he took that title, one of my works was so fortunate as to beguile some hours of pain, and led to my introduction to him. I visited him at Boyton Manor, the house he had in Wiltshire, and subsequently at Claremont, and elsewhere. He was a most cordial and kindly host, and never could have been mistaken, even by the most cynical nature, for a patron. His love of literature was so great and genuine, as to excuse my mention of him in this place, even if the interest attaching to his memory

were less deep and general. He had an hereditary talent for languages, and the passion of his race for music. These things were lost upon me and he knew it, and (as if I had been the Prince and he the Courtier) took pains to avoid those topics in my company. It was the same in politics, in which we had not an opinion in common. I remember visiting him at the time of the Turco-Russian war, and he observed on receiving me (in playful reference to my wrongheadedness in other matters) 'I do hope, Payn, you are at least a good Turk.' And when I was obliged to shake my head, he said, 'Well then, we won't talk about it;' and we never did. If this courteous reticence were more generally observed, a new charm would often be given to hospitality. As a host, indeed, Prince Leopold was almost faultless. He never forgot, however great might be the interval between their visits, the little peculiarities of his friends. In royal residences the early hours which are essential to my private comfort are not usual, nor is it customary to retire before the master of the house. But long before it grew late, he would make some pleasant observation about the habits of those who were not night birds, which left me free to go to roost. He was not a student in the ordinary sense of the word, though his knowledge of science and philosophy was probably much superior to mine, but he was well acquainted with the lighter branches of literature, and took great pleasure in them. I had the satisfaction of introducing him to the works of Lefanu, and his admiration of that author (so strangely neglected by the general public, notwithstanding the popularity of some of his imitators) vied with my own. He was fond of humour, though not of the boisterous kind (which perhaps requires physical health for its appreciation), and his favourite modern author was Thackeray. In Scott, too, he took great delight, and pointed out to me with pride a memento which had been given him by his hostess at Abbotsford, the bog oak walking-stick which Sir Walter brought away with him from Ireland, and of which he made such constant use. He had had his choice of richer relics, but had the good taste and sense to know what to choose.

'Lost Sir Massingberd' (which W. G. Clark *would* always call 'Found Sir Missing Bird') was published, like many of its successors, anonymously, an example which I would earnestly dissuade my literary brethren from following. If one has any personality belonging to one (whether it is spelt with an *i* or

not), it is just as well to claim it, otherwise some one is sure to do so. A literary gentleman in Glasgow, upon the strength of the authorship of this very book of mine, collected money from the charitable for some weeks. He said that the writer of the work in question had been very ill remunerated, and appealed with confidence to the spirit of fair play inherent in every British breast. Nay, curiously enough, so late as last summer there was another Richmond of this kind in the field; for my friend Walter Besant writes to me from a North-country inn as follows: 'I met a man in the coffee-room here who gave me many mysterious hints of his great position in the world of letters, and, finding him very anxious to be interrogated, took care not to trouble him with any questions. I asked the landlady, however, who he was. "Oh!" said she, "he is quite a famous literary gent; he wrote 'A Confidential Agent.''" My correspondent concludes his letter: 'I have always suspected this; he is a much more distinguished-looking fellow, and more likely to have done it, than you.' Such are the so-called friendships between literary men in the same line of business.

Speaking of impostors reminds me of two very fine specimens with whom, about this time, I became acquainted, one of whom adorned, and, for all I know to the contrary, may still adorn, my own profession. One evening a gentleman called at my house and requested to see me upon very particular business. As I was absent from home, he asked to see my wife. He was a gentlemanly-looking person of delicate appearance, and very shy hesitating manners. 'It is most unfortunate,' he stammered, 'for they told me at the office I should be sure to find Mr. Payn at home, and he is the only friend in London on whom I can rely under certain circumstances—pressing ones—in which I find myself.'

'You know my husband then?'

'No, Madam, I do not; but my name—Henslow—would not be unfamiliar to him. I am a novelist, and the author of a serial now running in the "Phoenix Magazine."'

His hostess smiled politely, but could not go so far as to say that we took in the 'Phoenix.' Could she give any message for him to her husband?

He shook his head. 'The fact is, Madam, my difficulty is very urgent; it is of a domestic and not of a literary character. I came up to town from Gloucestershire this morning with my

poor sister to consult a London physician upon her account. She is dying, but there are hopes of alleviation and mitigation. At Swindon Station I got out to get her some refreshment, and left my purse on the counter. We are absolutely without a penny between us.'

'Good heavens! But where *is* your sister?'

'She is in the second class ladies' waiting-room at Paddington Station. She has been there for eight hours. I have been all day waiting for the only acquaintance I had in town, but in vain. Then I thought of your husband, who, being of the same calling, and knowing me at least by name, would, I felt sure, lend me a few shillings.'

The question to have asked, no doubt, would have been, 'Why not have gone to the Editor of the "Phoenix"?' But my wife was touched by his evident distress of mind and the idea of the invalid in the waiting-room, and she gave him a sovereign on loan.

I naturally looked upon that sovereign as lost. It might indeed produce interest to my wife in Paradise, where all good deeds are said to fructify; but so far as I was concerned I felt sure I should never see either it or Mr. Henslow again.

The next morning, however, to my extreme surprise he called. A few words convinced me that he was the person he professed to be, and made me ashamed of my suspicions. 'Your wife's kindness,' he said, 'has enabled my sister to procure comfortable lodgings; our return tickets were fortunately not in my lost purse, and now we are going back again.'

'But your sister has not seen the physician?'

'No,' he said with a faint flush; 'we must come up again for that.' Of course I understood that he referred to his want of cash, and forgetting in my turn, for the moment, that he might just as well apply to the 'Phoenix' as to me, I advanced him another loan. He accepted it with as much modest hesitation as would have destroyed the last remnant of suspicion had any still survived within me, and, promising to return it by the next day's post, took his departure—for ever. No one that I know of has seen Mr. Henslow since. A week or so afterwards I called at the 'Phoenix' office, and found that I had not been imposed upon so far as his identity was concerned. He had, however, been paid beforehand for his serial story, and since then, as many callers testified, had levied contributions on the Charitable upon the

strength of that literary achievement. If these lines should meet the gentleman's eye, I should like him to know that he is forgiven, and that if he will only sit to me for his character I should like to have further pecuniary dealings with him. Such an idiosyncrasy as his must be would be well worth my professional attention.

The next greatest impostor I ever came across was F——, the famous spiritualist. Home being on the Continent at the time (though an imperative message from a court of law brought him shortly afterwards to England), F—— was then at the head of his profession in London, the very top of the table-turners. I met him for the first time at a large party where there were many persons distinguished in literature; not a few of whom, to my great surprise, were believers in him. I had thoroughly investigated the spiritual business (for copy), and knew it for what it was; it has long been exploded among all persons of intelligence, and is now only represented by its bastard offspring, thought-reading, but at that time it enjoyed considerable credit. As I was known to be sceptical, F—— undertook to tackle me. He promised that any dead friend of whom I should think should indicate his presence in the usual manner—like a postman. F—— rapped out my friend's surname accurately enough, though I did my best to delude him by not hesitating at the proper letter, but he was wrong in the christian name. He made it William instead of Henry, and I positively declined to hear any communication from a departed spirit who did not know the name given to him by his godfathers and godmother. There was in fact a bit of a row. The next day I mentioned the circumstance to H——, a common friend of mine and the dead man's, and he at once said, 'But you were wrong, my dear fellow; our friend's name *was* William. It was his brother [whom we had also known] who was Henry.'

The circumstances somewhat staggered both of us, and we thought it only right, in justice to F——, to let him know how the case stood. We accordingly called upon him in Seymour Street, where he gave his *séances*, and I made my apology. He was very dignified about it, and not at all triumphant. 'I have no power over these things myself,' he said; 'they are revealed to me; I am merely an instrument' (and so he was, a stringed one). He condescended so far, however, to combine business with his 'mission' as to suggest a *séance* then and there at a guinea a head, to which proposition we acceded.

I can see him now, a very fat, white-skinned man, with a face something like that of the first Napoleon, and I should think as great a scoundrel. His mode of procedure was to direct us to write down the names of a dozen dead friends on pieces of folded paper, and place them on the table. Then he would take one up in his large white hand, and inquire whether the spirit named therein was on the premises; and, after two or three trials (for success was never achieved the first time), the reply came in the affirmative. H—, though a man of great acquirements and intelligence, was of an exceptionally reverent nature, and he did not much like dealing with his dead friends so lightly; but eventually he did what was required of him. He wrote down, among others, the name of some one I had never heard of. It was a woman's name—let us call it Lucy Lisle—and, of course, I was unaware that he had done so. Suddenly the table at which we sat was violently perturbed—indeed, it was almost thrown upon us—and F—, in something like convulsions, raised his sleeve and displayed, written in letters of blood upon his arm, the words Lucy Lisle.

H—, greatly agitated, got up at once, and we left the house and took a walk together in Hyde Park, where we discussed the matter. As luck would have it, there we met W. G. Clark, of Cambridge, and confided to him what had occurred, and he agreed to take a guinea's worth of supernatural information from F—, in my company, the next morning. What had happened, as we both agreed, was that the conjuror, while 'making hay,' as it were, of the dozen pieces of paper, had contrived to possess himself of one of them, and afterwards of its contents (this was afterwards found to be the case, but he had also a blank slip, which he dropped when he took up the other, so that there should always be the right number upon the table). What puzzled me, and delighted Clark, were the letters of blood.

The very same thing took place as on the former occasion. F— pitched upon one of Clark's friends, and produced 'Henry James' upon his naked arm in gory characters.

'That is very curious,' said Clark in his dulcet tones. 'You have reproduced quite accurately the name that I wrote down; but I see that, by a mistake, no doubt arising from my official position' (he was Tutor of Trinity at the time), 'I have written it with the surname first; the deceased gentleman's name was James Henry. That you have read my slip of paper is certain; for that Mr. Henry, even in his disembodied state, should not

know his surname from his Christian name is incredible. I shall not hesitate to say what has happened here wherever I go, and I should recommend you to leave London.'

F—— took this excellent advice within twenty-four hours. It was afterwards found, by experiment, that letters written by a stylus upon a white skin will remain, and apparently in blood, for more than a minute. It was certainly a very effective performance.

Among other eminent individuals imposed upon by this specious personage was the author of 'A Strange Story,' who was even reported to have said that 'if there had been no revelation, Mr. F—— would have convinced him of the existence of another world.' I had had some correspondence with Lord Lytton concerning Leitch Ritchie's pension, his claims to which he had (as it seemed to me curiously enough) refused to advocate upon the ground that he (his Lordship) was in opposition to Her Majesty's Government; but the first time I met him was at the gathering at Knebworth in connection with the Guild of Literature and Art, which, though intended to become historical, was, to confess the truth, little short of a failure.

Some houses were built at Stevenage for the accommodation of decayed authors, in which none of them could be induced to live, even rent free. They pointed to the local train bills, and showed that it was impossible to reach their proposed homes after the performances at the theatres. This difficulty had not been taken into account by the patrons of the scheme, and there were others also—'What are you going to pay us for being buried alive at Stevenage?' for one.

The festival which was to inaugurate this new Arcadia of Literature was itself not a promising one. It was emphatically 'a scratch entertainment;' almost every author of eminence in London was invited to it, and a great many others; and 'the county' were asked to meet them. It was our host's idea to introduce these two classes to one another, so that, should any of the authors become 'decayed' (which was highly probable), they would be received with open arms by their landed neighbours. The two parties did not amalgamate. I was talking to Charles Collins, who with many others was staying in the house, when he was accosted by a fellow-guest of the 'exquisite' type. 'What a dem'd funny set of people!' he said; 'pon my life, before I was told who they were, I thought it was *the Foresters*.'

Charles Collins, brother of the novelist of that name and son-in-law to Dickens, was himself an excellent writer. His 'Cruise upon Wheels' is one of the most charming books of travel ever written, and his short sketches—notably those two accounts of a visit to the Docks, one supposed to be written under local influences, and the other the next day in all statistical sobriety—testify to his great powers of humour. He was in weak health, and endured with admirable patience more physical suffering than his friends were aware of. He, however, sometimes exhibited a whimsical finicality. 'No one gives less trouble than myself,' he once observed to a friend of mine who was his host, 'but I like my little tastes consulted. Your bacon at breakfast is not very streaky, and *would* you be so kind as to ask your man to hang up my great coat by the loop?'

I shall not easily forget his delight at the following little social *fiasco* which took place at the house of a dear, but somewhat fastidious, friend of ours in Westbourne Terrace. C——, a musical critic famous for his good dinners, happened to be calling at the same time as ourselves; he, too, was fastidious but in a much greater degree than our host, devoted to music, painting, and the fine arts, despising everyone who did not come up to his standard of culture, and I need hardly say, therefore, with a great horror of boys. Male children were smuggled away at his approach, lest they should put the accomplished creature out of tune. He was not in general very affable to anybody, but on this occasion he was exceptionally gracious, and especially to our host.

'My dear L——,' he exclaimed with effusion, 'are you engaged for Thursday week—Thursday, the twentieth? If not, I have a nice little plan.' L—— dived into his breast-pocket for his engagement list. He scented the best of dinners, and also excellent company, none the worse for the circumstance that the host would sometimes retire to his bed to compose something (or perhaps himself) and leave them to their own devices.

'I am happy to say,' he answered, 'that on Thursday week I am free.'

'That is capital. Then on Thursday week I will come and dine with you.'

'Very good,' returned L——, though with a decided falling off in the enthusiasm of his manner.

'Yes, I will come, and I will bring with me—what do you

think? a Bluecoat boy. The fact is,' he proceeded to explain with an air of great relief and satisfaction, 'that I have promised his friends to see him into the mail train at Paddington, which is a long way from my house; while from Westbourne Terrace, you see, it would be no trouble to me at all.'

The whole scene, much embellished by the chagrined countenance of our host, formed one of the prettiest bits of genteel comedy I ever saw on the stage of real life.

A still droller incident of by no means a 'genteel' kind—since it implicated me in a very serious criminal offence—took place about this time. A great jewel robbery was committed at the West End under very ingenious circumstances. A gentleman and lady staying at a fashionable hotel had ordered a large quantity of valuable goods—chiefly diamonds—to be brought to them for their inspection. They drugged or chloroformed (I forget which) the jeweller's assistant who brought them, and got clear away with all the swag. It so happened that the whole adventure had been, as it were, prefigured in 'Chambers's Journal' twelve months before; a contributor had imagined and written the incident just as it afterwards occurred, and the story had so recommended itself to some member of the criminal class that he had put it into practical execution. The jeweller thereupon wrote to the editor of the 'Journal' (poor me), charging him, not indeed with actual complicity with the crime, but as having been accessory to it before the fact. 'Under the pretence of elevating the masses,' he indignantly observed, 'you suggest to them ingenious methods of robbing honest tradesmen.' My answer to this gentleman was, I flatter myself, complete. I pointed out to him that if honest tradesmen would only read the respectable periodical I had the honour to edit—a moral duty not neglected, it seemed, even by the lowest classes—they would put themselves on their guard against such catastrophes. My position compelled me to appear to sympathise with the offenders, but I have always thought that they showed themselves miserably deficient in gratitude in never sending my contributor the least acknowledgment—not even one of the rings of which they had so many—for what he had done for them.

Their putting into practice the offspring of his imagination was certainly a curious thing to do. But Nature herself does not scorn to stoop to similar acts of plagiarism. We story-tellers are often the first to suggest an occurrence which, after it has actually

happened, goes, most unjustly, to strengthen the popular superstition that truth is stranger than fiction.

Some years after the publication of 'Lost Sir Massingberd' the following paragraph appeared in the 'Philadelphia Ledger':—

'A CURIOUS DISCOVERY.—The hurricane which passed over the Miami Valley on July 4th tore down a number of old trees, and amongst them a large oak. The owner of the property, a Mr. Rogers, on examining the extent of the damage done by the storm, discovered in the hollow of the fallen oak a human skeleton, with some brass buttons and shreds of clothing, and among other things a pocket-book with a number of papers. A communication to the *Miami County Democrat*, signed J. F. Clark, relates:—"The man's name, as gathered from the papers, was Roger Vanderburg, a native of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and a captain in the Revolutionary Army. He was an Aid to Washington during the retreat across the Jerseys, and served a time in Arnold's headquarters at West Point. In 1791 he marched with St. Clair against the North-western Indians, and in the famous outbreak of that general on the Wabash, November 3, of the year just written, he was wounded and captured. But while being conveyed to the Indian town at Upper Piqua he effected his escape, but found himself hard pressed by his savage foes. He saw the hollow in the oak, and despite the mangled arm, and with the aid of a beech that grew beside the giant then, he gained the haven and dropped therein. Then came a fearful discovery. He had miscalculated the depth of the hollow, and there was no escape. O, the story told by the diary of the oak's despairing prisoner! How, rather than surrender to the torture of the stake, he chose death by starvation; how he wrote his diary in the uncertain light and the snows! Here is one entry in the diary:—"November 10.—Five days without food! When I sleep I dream of luscious fruits and *flowing* streams. The stars *laugh* at my misery! It is snowing now. I freeze while I starve. God *pity* me!" The italicised words were supplied by Mr. Rogers as the trembling hand oft-times refused to indite plainly. The entries covered a period of eleven days, and in disjointed sentences is told the story of St. Clair's defeat. Mr. Rogers has written to Lancaster to ascertain if any descendants of the ill-fated captain live; if so, they shall have his bones."

Again, in 'Murphy's Master,' I got rid of a great number of disagreeable characters on an island in the Indian Seas, by the simple, though startling, device of submerging the island itself; the few respectable persons who inhabited it (including the hero and heroine) being most properly and providentially saved in a fishing-boat. Some critics thought it audacious; but Nature was so favourably impressed by my little plan, that she used it herself two years afterwards, and in a more comprehensive way than I should have dared to invent; an island in the Bay of Bengal, with the Kinshra lighthouse upon it, with seven scientific assistants, being submerged in a precisely similar manner.

I do not wish to be hard upon Nature, and, without giving details, which could not but wound her *amour propre*, will merely

remark that she committed a similar act of piracy in the case of my novel 'Found Dead.'

Though by no means a humorous story itself, that book, by the way, was the cause of a very fine stroke of humour. It was the custom with the very respectable firm of publishers, with whom I did business at that time, to pay my cheques to the names of my immortal works, instead of to myself; and since it suited their convenience so to do, I never complained of it, though it sometimes put me in rather a false position, when I presented my demands in person, as for example, in the case of the 'Family Scapegrace.' When I came for the proceeds of 'Found Dead,' it was too much for the sense of (professional) propriety of the banker's clerk, who gravely observed, 'It is very fortunate, Sir, that this cheque is not payable "to order," or it would have to be signed by your executors.'

This incident, I remember, delighted Dickens, who remarked, however, with a sudden access of gravity, 'I should not like to have much money at a bank which keeps so clever a clerk as that.'

He was himself an excellent man of business, though in early life he made great pecuniary mistakes by an impatience of disposition, a desire to get things settled and done with, which is shared by many men of letters to their great loss; he was painstaking, accurate, and punctual to a fault; and the trouble he took about other people's affairs, especially in his own calling, is almost incredible. Young men of letters are especially fortunate as regards the sympathy and assistance they receive from members of other professions. Almost all of us have our Dr. Good-enough. The lawyers, too, are always ready with their advice. I remember mentioning a legal difficulty, which I had come across in the plot of a novel, in the presence of one who is now perhaps the foremost man at the English bar. The next morning, though at that time we had only a mere club acquaintance, I received from him half-a-dozen clearly written pages explaining in the most lucid manner the law of the case in point. The chiefs of our own profession are always ready to give a helping hand to their juniors; but Dickens looked upon it as an imperative duty so to do. Many a time have young would-be contributors called upon me, and produced from their breast-pockets as passport to my attention, a letter of rejection, torn and frayed, and bearing tokens of having been read a hundred times, from the Master.

'He wrote me this letter himself,' they would say, as though

there were but one 'He' in the world. It was generally a pretty long one, though written at a time when minutes were guineas to him, full of the soundest advice and tenderest sympathy. There was always encouragement in them (for of course these were not hopeless cases), and often—whenever, in fact, there seemed need for other help besides counsel—some allusion, couched in the most delicate terms, to 'the enclosed.' Dickens not only loved his calling, but had a respect for it, and did more than any man to make it respected. With the pains he took to perfect whatever proceeded from his own pen everyone who has read his life must be conversant; but this minute attention to even the smallest details had its drawbacks. When an inaccuracy, however slight, was brought home to him, it made him miserable. So conscious was I of this, that I never liked to tell him of a mistake in 'Dombey and Son,' which has escaped the notice of 'readers' professional and otherwise, in every edition. The Major and Cleopatra sit down to play piquet; but what they do play—for they 'propose to' one another—is écarté.

In friendship, which in all other points must needs be frank and open, this problem often remains unsolved—namely, the friendship of one's friend for some other man. D and E have the most intimate relations with one another, but for the life of him E cannot understand what D sees in F to so endear him to him. This was what many of D's (Dickens's) friends, and certainly the world at large, said of F (John Forster). It is not my business, nor is it in my power, to explain the riddle; I rarely met them together without witnessing some sparring between them—and sometimes without the gloves. On the other hand, I have known Forster pay some compliments to 'the Inimitable' in his patronising way, which the other would acknowledge in his drollest manner. It is certain that Forster took the utmost interest in Dickens, even to the extent of seeing everything he wrote through the press, and as to the genuineness of Dickens's regard for him I have the most positive proof. I have already said that Dickens once wrote to me spelling the word Foster (in Foster Brothers) with an *r* 'because I am always thinking of my friend Forster.' Long afterwards, in acknowledging a service, which I had been fortunately able to do for him, in terms far more generous than it deserved, he actually signed the letter, not Charles Dickens, but John Forster.

When the biography of the former appeared, and its editor was accused of representing himself as standing in a nearer relation to

Dickens than he really was, I thought it only fair to Forster to send him those two letters, with which—though, of course, he had no need of the corroboration of such a matter from without—he expressed himself greatly pleased.

In 1871 I lost my old friend Robert Chambers, and with it, after a short interval, the editorship of the 'Journal.' My separation from it was a foregone conclusion. My relations with the surviving proprietor—always what the diplomatists call 'strained'—were severed within twelve months, notwithstanding the good offices of his nephew, Robert's son. My late contributors were so good as to present me with a silver inkstand, suitably inscribed, which I value beyond any possession I have in the world. Their spokesman (a humourist) whispered as he handed it to me, 'Attenborough's is the place,' but it has never gone there.

My literary life from that time has gone on very smoothly—perhaps more smoothly than I deserve. I have been especially fortunate in finding friendship where I might naturally have only looked for business relations, nor do I believe that I have an enemy in my own calling, nor even among my 'natural foes,' the critics. On the other hand, I am well aware that there are a good many people who dislike me very cordially. If they do so for a good reason, I exceedingly regret it; but there are some folks whose animosity is the highest of compliments. There is, in my opinion, no more fatal weakness in human nature than the desire to be thought well of by everybody.

When good fortune has once set in, the record of a man's life (especially a literary life) is apt to get uninteresting, and for that reason alone I should be disposed to end here, at all events for the present, what is after all rather a string of literary anecdotes (some of which, however, I venture to think have some interest) than a literary autobiography. Moreover the last decade of the life of a living person is rather a delicate matter to deal with.

It will be observed by those who have done me the honour of reading them, that these reminiscences have scrupulously avoided all mention, beyond a passing allusion, to authors who are happily still with us. I should have had nothing but good to say of them, which would have sadly disappointed some people, but in omitting them I am well aware that I have deprived my narrative of what would otherwise have been its chief attraction. It is unambitious enough, Heaven knows, and will interest, I fear, such persons

only as are interested in literary matters, and those but of the lighter kind. It is, in fact, the literary rather than the general public that I now address—a reflection which causes me to add a few words by way of postscript.

A personal experience to which I have already alluded has taught me, 'by harsh evidence,' that young persons who would embrace the literary calling are very prompt to see its attractions and very slow to understand its difficulties. From the somewhat light and airy tone (of which no one can be more conscious than myself) in which these Recollections have been written, they may conclude perhaps that the profession of literature requires little pains or study, and that such a moderate success at least as has been here described may be attained by a small amount of work. I can only say, for my part, that when I hear what are held to be hard-working men in other callings talk of 'work,' I smile. I have often found that what they mean by work (when they are not in the enjoyment of a more or less long vacation) is the remaining within the same four walls for a certain large number of hours *per diem*. Even when they do work, they have something to work *upon*: they have not to spin the very threads of their work out of their own brains before they begin business. I have not indeed been so close a prisoner as some of them, for the necessities of my calling (so far as novel-writing is concerned) have often compelled me to seek change of scene, for 'local colouring;' but for the last five-and-twenty years of my life I have only had three days of consecutive holiday once a year; while all the year round (from another necessity of the pen) the Sundays have been as much working days with me as the week days.

Such from day to day labours, though not, it is true, extending to long hours, would perhaps have been impossible but for the relief afforded by some favourite amusement; this, in my case, as it has been in that of much greater men, has been the noble game of whist, which I have played regularly for two or three hours a day for the last thirty years. It does not, indeed, much matter what it is, so that the relaxation is an attractive one, but I pity that man from the bottom of my heart who can find no interest in a game. It is not everyone who, like Sarah Battle, can relax their minds over a book, and least of all those who write books. I have noticed that those of my own calling who read the most are not the best students of human nature, and fall most often into the pit of plagiarism. How often have I heard it said—too late—by

those who have most certainly earned their play time, 'How I wish I had an amusement!' The taste for such things must be caught early (like the measles) and indulged (like the patient); what position, for example, is more unsatisfactory than that of the man who has only played whist occasionally—say once a week—and 'makes up a rubber to oblige'? In a partner's eyes, at least, such a person will never meet his obligations. Mackworth Praed must have been a whist-player, or he never could have depicted 'Quince.'

Some public principles he had,
But was no flatterer nor fretter
He rapped his box when things were bad,
And said 'I cannot make them better.'
And much he loathed the patriot's snort,
And much he scorned the placeman's snuffle,
And cut the fiercest quarrel short,
With 'patience, gentlemen,—and shuffle.'

Men of letters are rarely good card-players—Lord Lytton and Lever are almost the only exceptions I can call to mind—but some of them have been fond of whist, and have enlivened it by their sallies. A few of these, which I have happened myself to hear, seem worthy of record.

A guest being asked to a dinner party, which was to precede an evening at cards, thus apologised for coming in morning costume, 'The suit is surely no matter, so long as one is a Trump.'

A man who had his foot on a gout-rest was holding very bad cards, and complaining alike of his luck and his malady. Upon being reproached by his more fortunate adversary for his irritation, he suddenly exclaimed, 'It's all very well for *you*, but a "game hand" is a very different thing from a "game leg."

On another occasion the same gentleman (whose temper, gout or no gout, was always a little short) jumped up from the seat where he had been losing and declared that he would play no more. 'But you'll break up the table,' pleaded the others pathetically. 'If it is broken up there will still be three "legs" left,' was his uncompromising reply.

A whist-player, who even though he was a loser, ought to have known better than to have jested upon such a tender subject, once remarked with reference to the considerable number of novels for which I have been responsible, 'Nobody can deny, my dear fellow, that you have great "numerical strength."¹

¹ A term used to express plenty of small cards without an honour.

I remember a little poem called 'Dumby,' written by a brother novelist, who has himself, alas ! left a vacant place at the four-square table for ever, which has a pathetic singularity about it :

I see the face of the friend I lost
Before me as I sit,
His thin white hands, so subtle and swift,
And his eyes that gleam with wit.

I see him across the square green cloth
That's dappled with black and red ;
Between the luminous globes of light
I watch the friend long dead.

It is only I who can see him there,
With victory in his glance,
As, the cross ruff stopped, he strides along
Like Wellington through France.

He died years past in the jungle reeds,
But still I see him sit,
Facing me with his fan of cards,
'And those eyes that beam with wit.

In that excellent poem of Thomas Hood's in which he describes the village of Bullock Smithy, he exhibits a natural disinclination to come to the workhouse.

There is one more house,
he says,

Which we have not come to yet, and I hope we never shall,
And that's the Parish poorhouse.

In these recollections of mine I feel a similar reluctance to allude to the Playhouse, for the fact is my merits have never been recognised on the boards. The subject is a sore one, and I will merely say that when I think of a certain comedietta called 'The Substitute,' and the way in which it was treated by the dramatic critics, I appreciate Landor's observation, made under similar circumstances in connection with his 'Imaginary Conversations,' that he would bet a pint of porter that none of his detractors, even if they took off their coats to it, would come within a mile of them. The 'Substitute' ran for six weeks out of the season, at the Court Theatre, and then I suppose ran right away, for I have never heard of it since. It was really one of the brightest—but there, as Tennyson used (rather doubtfully) to be advertised to say among the eulogistic criticisms on 'Festus,' 'I dare not venture to say what I think about that play.'

If I have not been appreciated on the stage, however, I have nothing to complain of in respect to my reception off the boards.

The observation of a great writer on having half-a-dozen bottles of brandy sent him by an anonymous admirer, is well known. 'This,' he said with complacency, 'is true fame.' For my part, as is only in accordance with the rules of proportion, I have had to be content with much inferior liquor—mere ginger-beer, a drink which is effervescent no doubt, but while it lasts is refreshing enough. I once lost a Persian cat, which (I had almost written 'who') was very dear to me, and went to a suburban police office for professional advice as to handbills and rewards. 'What is your name, sir,' inquired the intelligent inspector. (It is cynically observed that inspectors are always called in the newspapers 'intelligent;' but this one, as will be seen, fully deserved the title.) As my business was a lawful one, I of course gave him no *alias*.

'James Payn?' he echoed. 'Are you the story-teller?'

I modestly murmured that I was.

'Then I tell you what,' he said, in a tone in which generosity and gratitude were finely blended, 'you are out of my district, but *I'll take the case.*'

And he took it. That was *my* brandy.

I have also had sums of money borrowed of me at various times by admirers of my genius—but that has given me less satisfaction.

THE END.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES.

'THE Atlantic is a century,' says the American patriot. A man may live the life of his great-great-grandchildren by spending eight days at sea, but he can do something yet more interesting, he can live the life of his ancestors in the middle ages by taking a shorter journey, merely a train journey, which will land him on the platform at Lourdes. In the former case it is the future, in the latter the past which is reduced to manageable dimensions. The noisy steam engine, the fussy officials, the name of the Birmingham builder of the carriage incidentally catching the eye, serve to remind the traveller that he is in the nineteenth century; but for the rest, he has 'trundled his soul' back over 'the full-mouthed centuries' to the ancient world, when much was done by miracle, and travel was a pilgrimage.

But what is it by which he is involuntarily transported? What is that which so fills the air at Lourdes, that even the twentieth-century American would perforce forget his extra centuries if he turned up there during last summer? It is no less a fact than that 1883 was the year of the Silver Wedding of the Virgin of Lourdes. To the sober-minded Protestant the very statement seems incongruous and indecorous, but not so to the more fanciful French Catholic, to whom the occasion is one for burning zeal, self-sacrificing devotion, and unusual generosity.

Twenty-five years ago Lourdes was a simple mountain town, proud of a castle rich in historical memories, fond of its mountains, which, curtsying aside, allowed it to peep up the lovely Pyrenean valley, glad of its fertilising stream and its lower undulating hills, ever ready to yield abundantly under the neat and laborious cultivation of the frugal inhabitants. But a girl of fourteen, one Bernadette Soubirous, by all accounts a simple guileless lassie, was to revolutionise the life of the quiet market town, roll it back over the centuries, and make it a world-wide resort. She was what is called a pious child, and, although too weakly to attend school, was of good health—and upon this point the believing historians of the subsequent events lay not unnecessary stress. She was so attached to her beads that her playfellows used to say, '*Celle-là n'est bonne que pour dire des chapelets.*'

To this child's credulous eyes the Virgin appeared no less than eighteen times. The tale of the Vision was noised abroad, and on the last occasion 10,000 people from the neighbouring villages came to see, if possible, what she saw. But they saw nothing. To their eyes the consecrated cave was but a common cavern, the holy niche wherein the Vision appeared only a plain, ivy-grown rock, with a beauty common enough in that country to have ceased to be an object of interest. One thing though they saw, and that was the damsel so lost in ecstasy at what *she* saw that she seemed not to feel the flame of a burning candle. When she rose she repeated the words told her by the Virgin, which were, in brief, that the Virgin wished the people to be happy, and bade them eat the herb of that place, and wash in the water. 'I am the Immaculate Conception,' were the concluding words, and thereby she proclaimed her name. Straightway water flowed from the cave, and although, unfortunately, this was not the sign which the incredulous priest had told the child to require as the condition of his belief, it is the water and the words which have made the Lourdes of to-day.

The cave, ivy-grown and grass-surrounded still (for in spite of the holy command the pilgrims are begged by conspicuous notices not to touch the grass), is no longer left to be a storm-sheltering grotto for little Bernadettes and their goats. It is now the 'Holy Place' of hundreds and thousands, the place where prayer is wont to be made by pilgrims from all lands.

Across its wide mouth are strong iron railings—not unnecessarily strong, for enthusiasm lends strength to crowds. In the centre is the tawdry altar. Candle-stands capable of carrying some hundreds of candles are placed at intervals, and an image of the Virgin has been hoisted on to a natural niche outside.

To this cave, by excellent roads from all directions, stream masses of people. 'All sorts and conditions of men' kneel before it in the roadway. We notice the cultivated man side by side with the rough peasant, and the fashionable lady as absorbed as her horny-handed neighbour, clothed by the work of her own distaff. On the day of our visit it was a pilgrimage from Normandy which had arrived: peasant women in their stiff white caps (with embroideries which set the feminine mind wondering if not coveting); peasant men in their bright blue blouses; Breton seamen strong with patience, unworldly in simplicity, recalling the 'Hervé Real' of Browning's poem, all kneel reverently before the cave, respond piously to the monotonous litany which a priest

chants from the rough pulpit in their midst, or bow with humility as the Host (umbrella-covered!) passes through their midst. At a given word the gates are opened, a 'Salvation Army-like' chorus started, and the crowds file into the cavern.

It is pathetic beyond description to see them with greedy eagerness press their handfuls of rosaries—one perhaps well-worn, the rest new to take to friends—against the water dripping from the walls of the cave, to see them kiss with passionate earnestness the damp rock, to watch them dip corners of handkerchiefs into the little pools which the trickling water has left, to hear a murmured hurried prayer that this may cure the sick child far away at home, or give the long-desired strength to the father too weak to go on pilgrimage himself. It is touching to see the gratitude beaming in the face of the poor pale body who has entered to leave her crutches, which are not wanted now, for has not the holy water cured her? and it certainly is one of the peculiarities of this cave chapel that its ornamentation consists not of banners, pictures, or mosaics, but of crutches hung in rows from the ceilings, of surgical instruments, of spectacles, invalid chairs and other appliances, fastened to the walls—left there not because their owners think them beautiful, but because they could go away without, and would leave them to serve as witness that the 'Mother of God' had smiled on them. A stone's-throw from the cave are the curing-sheds, to which the sick, halt, maimed, and blind are carried to be bathed and rubbed with the holy water; kindly bystanders are pressed into their service, and all are invited to join in a 'Litany of Pity' for their sufferings, or a 'Song of Jubilee' if they come out cured, which sure enough they sometimes do.

Besides the sheds are rows of water-taps over which are notice-boards assuring the faithful that they convey the water which sprang from the cave after the wonderful vision. Reminded by the very prosaic notice, and by the brass taps constructed on the best patent principle, that one is in the nineteenth century, one pauses for a moment to criticise; but on those earnest faces there is no place for doubt, and one is swept back again into sympathy with the faith of the times that are gone, but which we are told by every word and action still lives. Before us are six thousand of these honest working folk who have paid their fifty or sixty francs, have sat the long weary hours in the jolting train, have put up with rough accommodation, and coarse, if expensive food, because it is the 'Silver Wedding of the Virgin,' and because his Holiness the Pope himself has promised a full

indulgence to all who do her honour by making the pilgrimage this year, which indulgence—and here, doubtless, in many cases, is the sufficient moving cause—‘may, perhaps, extend to those now in Purgatory.’ But the journey does not of itself secure this favour; the pilgrim must pay three visits to the grotto, he must confess fully, and give an alms to the extent of his ability—and there is no doubt that in the past the ‘extent’ has been generously judged. At the top of the rocky hill in which the cavern is hollowed, the pilgrims’ alms have built a church, a handsome modern Gothic structure containing some fourteen chapels, besides the Lady chapel, and supported by a crypt equally well proportioned. The building is of plain white stone, wholly undecorated. Gratitude has been the sole decorator, and its ways are neither sparse nor mean. Gratitude has given banners, rich in material, beautiful in workmanship, to the number of 600, any two of which would make bright one of the ugly churches in a poor dull neighbourhood. The healed have literally lined the church with white marble, put up in small tablets, on each of which is inscribed in gilt letters the malady, the date, and the name of the cured donor; and thousands of gold and silver hearts form on the walls above texts from the words of the Lady of the Grotto. Gratitude, too, made General — give up his epaulettes, and the young matron what she valued most—her bridal wreath. Willing hands have worked the curtains and hangings with rare embroidery, and willing givers have hung the sacred building with lamps of Venetian glass or fretted brass work. It is gratitude which is still showering into large coffers the money to build yet another erection on the foundations of which the workmen are (not waiting for a miracle) already busily at work with prosaic tools and carefully laid tramways. It is, though, the gratitude of the unquestioning middle ages, and while the pilgrims climb in long and solemn procession the winding road to yonder hill, on whose summit is the ancient cross standing in bold relief against the southern blue of the sky, it would be as well to summon the nineteenth century critical spirit, and ask what it all means, and what is at the root of all. The inquirer will be told a story, an unseemly story, of the credulity of the country girl being used as a cover for an unlovely love intrigue; he will be told of priestly trickery, of peasants’ foolish piety, and of the strength of self-deception. He will hear all, and while he may condemn a Church which fosters such things, he will still feel that he is in the presence of a phenomenon in human history which needs further consideration.

LONGER LIFE.

THE present generation has enjoyed, on the whole, a remarkable amount of prosperity. Trade and industrial production have expanded immensely within the last thirty years; the value of labour has risen, while capital has found highly profitable investments. And thus, while the returns of the income-tax show an enormous increase of wealth among the middle and upper classes, anyone who can use his eyes has only to look around, either in town or country, to see how great and cheering has been the improvement alike in the dwellings and in the general condition of the working classes. As a happy, and indeed natural consequence of this general prosperity, and partly also as the effect of sanitary legislation, there has recently set in a marked and apparently steady increase in the duration of life in this country, which, of itself, and still more with respect to what it implies, is well worthy of notice and self-gratulation. Is it not worth knowing, even as a simple matter of fact, that the young generation now growing up around us—to speak exactly, those born since 1870—are likely to enjoy better health, and likewise to live fully two years and a half longer than their parents, or at least than the average lifetime of the generation which is passing away? This is taking boys and girls together; but, as usual, the chances of life are in favour of ‘the weaker sex’—the recent increase in the average duration of life for females being almost three and a half years, and two years for males.

A very important portion of this change has undoubtedly been due simply to the remarkable general prosperity which began with the latter half of this century, and of which the fruits still so largely remain. People who are ‘better off’ can and do take better care of their health, and have more time for holidays and recreation. And that such a change has occurred is plainly shown by the shorter hours of work and increased habits of pleasure-taking among all classes of our people. But the main and most manifest cause of increased longevity must be ascribed to legislation—to the Factory Acts, to the ‘inspection’ or official supervision of certain kinds of industry, the additional precautions for personal safety in the working of coal-pits, and the measures taken

to prevent adulteration of the articles of diet; also, very notably, the Public Health Acts of 1871 and 1875; and, not least, the great works of sanitation and urban improvements undertaken by many of the municipal bodies throughout the kingdom, of which the 'main drainage' works of London (which cost about twelve millions sterling) are the most notable example. Concurrently, and indeed as the source of these things, there has been a strong public sentiment of philanthropy, which gave birth to the 'Saturday half-holiday,' and to a general encouragement and promotion of popular recreation. Altogether, there has been a marked growth of humane and generous feeling; and anyone of mature years has only to compare his own boyhood with the pleasanter conditions of life which now surround the young, to see how great and happy has been the wide social change effected during his own lifetime.

Nevertheless, for a long time there existed great doubts as to whether the new sanitary works and regulations were really efficient, and would accomplish their beneficent purpose. The cost was heavy as well as obvious, while the results were apparently *nil*. Our national life-statistics began to be kept in 1838; and for seventeen years thereafter there was no improvement—the death-rate and duration of life remained, on the average, unchanged. It seemed as if the conditions of human longevity were fixed too deeply in the nature of things to be appreciably altered by human effort. The rate of mortality was at its highest in the years 1847 and 1849, when influenza and cholera were epidemic—bad years, in fact, in all ways, with famine in Ireland, revolutions on the Continent, and bad trade everywhere. In those two years the annual death-rate was respectively 24·7 and 25·1 per thousand. On the other hand, in the five years 1841–5, when on the whole the weather was fine and trade good, the death-rate averaged only 21·4; and in the year 1856, with its beautiful summer, the rate was only 20·5. But still, as already said, taking the whole period (1838–54), people in Great Britain died just at the same rate throughout; the average death-rate for the period being about 23½ per thousand annually. This was, no doubt, disappointing. But, besides the fact that the sanitary works and legislation were still in their infancy, and also that new conditions require time to operate upon the physical frame, acting cumulatively, it needs further to be remembered that there was in progress a great increase of town life—a shifting of population from the country into the large towns, producing an aggregation and

modes of life much less favourable to health than the open-air life of rural districts. It is also worthy of notice that, although, owing to a combination of causes, there has been, for a generation past, a general tendency for the rural population to stagnate, and in many counties to diminish, the influx from the country into the towns is greatest in bad times. In the following statistics of the remarkable growth of population in London during the present century, it will be seen that the highest percentages of increase occurred in the two decennial periods, 1821-30 and 1841-50, when the industrial condition of the kingdom was at its worst, and political discontent (as usual) was peculiarly rife:—

Year.	Population of London.	Increase per cent. in decade.
1801	958,863	—
1811	1,138,815	18·7
1821	1,378,947	21·1
1831	1,654,994	20·0
1841	1,948,217	17·7
1851	2,362,236	21·2
1861	2,803,989	18·8
1871	3,254,260	16·1
1881	3,816,483	17·3

Increase since 1801, 2,857,620.

Accordingly, although the sanitary improvements were at that time inadequate to reduce the rate of mortality throughout the kingdom, they at least served to nullify the insalubrious effects of the rapid increase of town life then in progress.

Thereafter, however, the desired and expected change came quickly, and in so manifest a manner as to leave no doubt that 'sanitation' was capable of doing its work effectively. In the five years 1871-75 the death-rate fell perceptibly, averaging 22 per thousand; in the next five years (1876-80) it fell to 20·8; in the year 1881 it fell to 18·9; in 1882 it stood at only 18·6; and in the autumnal quarter of last year to only 16·6 per thousand of the population of England. For the whole of last year, the death-rate in England was 19·5, and if the great towns be excluded, 17·7 per thousand. Thus, for a dozen years past, the rate of mortality has been steadily and greatly on the decrease, and when the cumulative influence of sanitary work is considered, it may fairly be expected that the decline of the death-rate is far from having reached its limits.¹

¹ In the autumnal quarter of last year the death-rate in London (where a population equal to that of all Scotland is perilously concentrated within an

The stage to which we have at present attained may be stated thus. Compared with the period 1838-54 (the earliest for which there are trustworthy records), the average duration of a man's life is now 41·9 years instead of 39·9, and of a woman's 45·3 instead of 41·9 years, an addition of eight per cent. to the female life and five per cent. to the male. Of each thousand males born at the present day, forty-four more will attain the age of thirty-five than used to be the case previous to 1871. For the whole of life, the estimate now is that of one thousand persons (one-half males and one-half females), 35 survive at the age of forty-five, 26 at fifty-five, 9 at sixty-five, 3 at seventy-five, and 1 at eighty-five. To put the case in another way, every thousand persons born since 1870 will live about 2,700 years longer than before. In other words, the life of a thousand persons is now equal in duration to that of 1,070 persons previously; and 1,000 births will now keep up the growth of our population as well as 1,070 births used to do.

This is equivalent in result to an increase of our population, and in the best form, viz. not by more births but by fewer deaths, which means fewer maladies and better health. What is more, nearly 70 per cent. of this increase of life takes place (or is lived) in the 'useful period'—namely, between the ages of twenty and sixty. Thus, of the 2,700 additional years lived by each thousand of our population, 70 per cent., or 1,890 years, will be a direct addition to the working power of our people.

It is to be remembered that there might be a great addition to the births in a country with little addition to the national working power—nay, with an actual reduction of the national

area only a few miles square) was only 18·8, and for the whole year 20·4, per 1,000. Yet, how much remains to be done, and how much may yet be accomplished, in improving the health of our modern Babylon, may be seen, *inter alia*, from a recent report of Dr. Little, Medical Officer of Health for Whitechapel, who denounces a large *newly erected* block of buildings containing 73 rooms as 'totally unfit for human habitation.' In some of these rooms there was no light even on a bright day; the sanitary arrangements were quite unsatisfactory, and there was no yard or open space, although the building is intended for 200 people. Another building of the same character is described as 'Plough Street Buildings,' Whitechapel, having in one block 83 rooms, of which 79 were occupied by 178 persons, 91 of whom were adults and 87 children, 'the lower order of foreigners, and very dirty.' As in the other case, the ground floor is occupied by shops, and though the building has only been erected about four years, it is described as in part 'quite unfit for habitation.' As the public are now aware, such cases may be multiplied a hundredfold.

wealth and prosperity—seeing that, regarded as ‘economic agents,’ children are simply a source of expense, and so also are a majority of the elderly who have passed the age of threescore. On the other hand, as already said, only one quarter of the longer or additional life now enjoyed by our people is passed in the useless periods of childhood and old age, and more than one-third of it is lived at ages when life is in its highest vigour, and most productive alike of wealth and of enjoyment.

This lengthened duration of life has been achieved in the face of a great and progressive change in the relative numbers of the rural and urban population—the latter of which has risen since 1851 from 51 per cent. of the whole to 59 per cent. No correct comparison of death-rates can be made without taking into account the different constitution of the compared populations as regards age and sex; and the difference in this respect between town and country causes the urban death-rate to appear more favourable than it really is. In the Census Report of 1881 the important remark is made: ‘If we take the mean (1871–80) death-rates in England and Wales at each age-period as a standard, the death-rate in an urban population, as constituted above, would be 20·40 per 1,000, while the death-rate in the rural population would be 22·83. Such would be their respective death-rates on the hypothesis that the urban districts and the rural districts were equally healthy. We know, however, as a matter of fact, that the urban death-rates instead of being lower than rural death-rates are much higher. The difference of healthiness, therefore, between the two is much greater than the difference between their death-rates.’ Dr. Longstaff, writing upon this subject in March last,¹ proposes to represent the true death-rate for the principal towns and for the rural districts by the numbers ·959097 and 1·073343 respectively. And he adds, ‘The increased mortality from cancer and several of the “local diseases,” the increase in lunacy (though this is not so great as it appears), the deterioration of eyesight, the unquestioned premature decay of the teeth of the rising generation, and to a much smaller extent the prevalence of premature baldness, convince me that there are conditions attendant on life in towns which no hygienic knowledge, no improved administration, not even a new municipal government for London, can wholly overcome. Some amount of degeneration of race appears inevitable, and in the United States of America, where all sociological

¹ Paper read before the Statistical Society, March 18, 1884.

phenomena are seen in more rapid evolution than here, it is said to be even already very evident.'

Dr. Longstaff also gives a highly interesting analysis of the rates of mortality, from which it appears that while several kinds of disease are on the decline, others are distinctly increasing in fatality. As might be expected under improved sanitation, six of the 'zymotic diseases'—viz. fever, cholera, diarrhoea, small-pox, scarlet fever, and measles—are proving less fatal than they were thirty years ago; but three other zymotic diseases—viz. diphtheria, croup, and whooping-cough—are slightly worse. Coming to another class of diseases, we find a greatly increased mortality from lung-diseases—equal to 1,213 more deaths per million of the population; and an equally distinct fall in the mortality from phthisis, or pulmonary consumption (now known to be a specific disease, not an ordinary lung-complaint), equal to 694 less deaths per million. Heart-disease is greatly on the increase, killing as many more as consumption now kills less. Rheumatic fever (a prolific parent of heart-disease) is likewise on the increase. So also are cancer and diseases of the liver and kidneys. Finally, brain-diseases (exclusive of convulsions) are increasingly fatal; while convulsions and hydrocephalus are less fatal, showing that the increase of brain-disease occurs in mature or advanced life, not in childhood—a fact doubtless illustrative of the mischief attending the 'high pressure' under which life nowadays is carried on. Nevertheless, as we have shown, there is on the whole a distinct and remarkable improvement in the condition of our people as regards health and longevity.

A mere prolongation of life is not necessarily a boon; indeed, if life be prolonged beyond its working power, it is apt to be a weariness to its possessor, and (like childhood) certain to be a loss or waste to the community. Nevertheless an increased duration of life carries with it some of the richest treasures of existence. In a recent debate in the House of Commons on pigeon shooting, one of the champions of this amusement informed the House that a large number of 'blue-rock' pigeons are reared expressly for this sport, and he grotesquely challenged any member to say, 'if he had the choice, whether he would not rather be a blue-rock at Hurlingham than nothing at all?' Without attempting an answer to such a question (which certainly taxes the conceivable powers of the human mind), we must point out that what makes an increased duration of life to be worthily desired is, that it implies

or involves an improvement both in the circumstances of life and in life itself. It means alike more health and more comfortable and agreeable surroundings. It is because of better circumstances that we have better health, and it is only through better health that we have and enjoy longer life. And health—more health—how much happiness is packed in these brief words! What is health but the perfection of life, and the one great boon which gives the means of enjoying all the others? It is the portal through which life can enter upon its natural enjoyments. Without health, the salt of life loses its savour; whereas when health is in its prime, the troubles and reverses of life weigh not more heavily than the rain-drops which glide off the duck's back. Indeed at times—rare times it may be, in this high-pressure age—a state of health may be distinctly felt as a happiness of itself, being the perfection of that rhythmic and harmonious movement of varied powers and sensations which constitutes existence.

While attributing this beneficial change to the co-operating effects of material prosperity and sanitary legislation, it would be ungrateful if we did not allow some share in the good work to the contemporaneous improvement of the healing profession. Medical physiology has fully shared in the brilliant discoveries and inventions which science has so strikingly achieved during the last forty years. No longer can it be said of the physician that he 'puts drugs about which he knows little into a body about which he knows less.' It seems as if more than a single generation must have passed since Sir Walter Scott described the country doctor as only a little less hardly worked than his horse, and carrying as his whole stock of medical appliances a lancet in his pocket and a bottle of calomel in his saddle-bags. 'Do what you think best; never mind what people say: no theory can overturn the facts of the dissecting-room,' was the maxim of Sir Astley Cooper; and since then it would be long to tell the manifold advance which has been made in the knowledge and cure of the maladies to which flesh is heir. Chloroform and the antiseptic treatment have well-nigh removed the terrors and have greatly reduced the dangers of surgical operations; while science has worked hard to supply appliances for discovering the germs and tracking the progress of disease. For the physician, the optician now grinds his most powerful lenses; the electrician prepares batteries that heat the wire by which bloodless operations are performed; and from the workshops of the cutler and mechanician the choicest appliances

in the shape of instruments are put at the disposal of those who formerly considered themselves well equipped with a tourniquet, a scalpel, a saw, and that dreadful lancet which used to let out so many lives in the hands of Dr. Sangrado.

One very striking result of the increased health and better preserved vitality of the community is to be seen in the great age at which our public men continue to work and do good service. A Palmerston, a Beaconsfield, or a Gladstone are in fullest vigour at seventy. Lord Beaconsfield once remarked that Canning died a boy, yet Canning lived to fifty-seven ! Pitt, that youthful genius and master-spirit—perhaps the greatest statesman whom England has ever produced—died ten years younger, at forty-seven ! In truth, with few exceptions, politicians are now hardly taken seriously till they have arrived at Thackeray's 'age of wisdom,' and often they do not hold office until they are grandfathers. Now, too, it is becoming almost a matter of course that our leading personages should die in harness, passing away with no twilight of existence ; full of years, but still in the zenith of their fame. And consider, since such is the case in these prominent examples, what an amount of real benefit must be contemporaneously occurring among the masses of our people, who with greater health work more, save more, enjoy more, reaching the threescore years with a vigour or vitality less shaken by illness or infirmity, and consequently better able to maintain themselves in face of the ever-increasing pace at which the wheels of life go on crushing and grinding.

Esto perpetua ! May this happy change in the conditions of human life continue ! Verily, each generation needs to be stronger in order to keep equal to the ever-increasing strain of thought, as well as of commercial rivalry and industrial competition. And this much we may venture to say confidently, that if there be a continuance of the happily improved circumstances which have already both strengthened and lengthened human life in our country, this vital improvement will likewise continue, and, probably, in still greater proportion, seeing how cumulative in their action all sanitary improvements are. No doubt there is a fixed or tolerably definite term for human life. It is still true, as in the days of Moses, that threescore and ten years sum up the ordinary life of man, and that, if it run to fourscore years, the prolongation is rarely to be envied or desired. But, within these old, old limits how much remains to be accomplished ! Even now, the average lifetime is only one-half of what physical philosophers regard as

man's 'natural period,' and although we question whether any advantage or additional pleasure, even to themselves, is to be found in the multiplying of the aged—as by a more numerous overpassing of the fourscore years—how vast might be the increase of happiness if mankind were to become so healthy that ordinarily, or on the average, they were comfortably without sickness to complete the moderate threescore years! How small, comparatively, would then be the waste of life and of its power of work and enjoyment; and how much would the sorrows of life and difficulties of society be lightened by the greater ease with which each family would be able to provide for its members!

At the outset, we attributed the recent increase of health and longevity largely to the remarkable prosperity which our generation has enjoyed, and which has made famous the third quarter of the present century—an almost millennial period in our own country, and, to a great extent, all over the world. The improvement of health, we have said, has been mainly a consequence of that prosperity in money-making which alike prompted and rendered possible the lightening of labour, the State education of the poor, and the improved sanitation. And, as all such changes operate slowly, we of the present day have probably not yet reached the maximum result of the new influences, and the next generation may reap a harvest where, as yet, we see only the green corn.

But, alas! is there not another side to the picture? Human history seems divided into long alternating periods of prosperity and adversity; slow-moving tides, readily noticeable when at their full, yet the beginning and end of which is almost or wholly inscrutable to the keenest on-looker. And—how can we hide it? Is there not too much ground for apprehension lest one of those bright summer-times is now wholly past, and we are sliding anew into a 'winter of discontent,' another 'glacial period,' chilling and depressing the powers of industry? And the thought arises, 'Shall we be able to hold through the winter the happy fruits which we won under the golden summers?' The shortening and lightening of labour, the protection of women and children, and the various beneficial but costly restrictions now imposed upon dangerous or unhealthy trades, and in shipping—all these, doubtless, were the outcome of a fine humanity, of a greater warmth and sensitiveness of the national conscience. Granted—cheerfully granted. We should lament, we might despair, were it not so. Nevertheless,

it was the golden prosperity which co-inspired and alone permitted or rendered practicable these popular benefactions. Without that prosperity, could these restrictions upon labour and money-making, even if made, have been maintained in the face of the keen and growing international competition, an industrial rivalry with peoples less wealthy than we are, and who are ready to work without such mitigating limitations? The industrial crisis in Paris was attributed by one of the chief witnesses before the Investigation Committee (the president of the carpentering trade) to the high prosperity which had till recently prevailed, and to the fact 'that the average rate of pay had increased, since 1845, from 3½ to 7 francs, whereas it was now impossible to compete with Germany and other foreign countries where labour is cheaper; and that, consequently, of the twenty thousand workmen in his trade only ten thousand could obtain employment;' these ten thousand, doubtless, being the *élite* of their class, whom alone it was profitable to employ at the present advanced rate of wages.

This is a significant fact which it is not safe to overlook. Here, as in Paris, our people, while accepting the new holidays and the factory and other restrictions in their favour, have hardly realised that such changes demand something upon their part, and that if their improvement in health, comfort, and knowledge is to be a safe possession, that improvement must have some equivalent return to the community in steadier and better labour. Complaints have now become rife in nearly all quarters that trade cannot hold its own against the increasing industrial competition of foreign countries, fettered as we are by legislative restrictions. Surely this ought not to be the case. Healthier, and happier, and educated workmen ought to do better work, and thereby compensate the commonwealth for the pecuniary sacrifice which it has been making on their behalf, and so maintaining for themselves a continued enjoyment of the social benefits accomplished by that sacrifice. Our national prosperity since the middle of the century has been remarkable and truly blessed; may the untoward and threatening features of the present hour soon pass away, and our whole people continue to retain and advance in that all-round improvement in their condition and happiness which is typified by and has its natural outcome in 'Longer Life.'

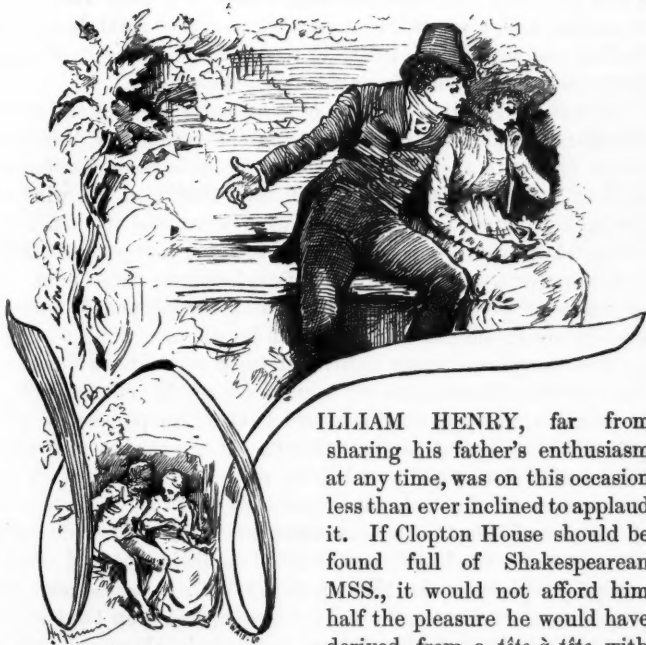
THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

BY JAMES PAYN.

AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD SETTLE.



WILLIAM HENRY, far from sharing his father's enthusiasm at any time, was on this occasion less than ever inclined to applaud it. If Clopton House should be found full of Shakespearean MSS., it would not afford him half the pleasure he would have derived from a tête-à-tête with

his cousin Margaret; a treat which it seemed was to be thrown away upon Frank Dennis. Why didn't Mr. Erin select *him* to take notes for him from the musty documents? A question the folly of which only a high state of irritation could excuse. He knew perfectly well that his own dexterity and promptness in copying had caused himself to be chosen for the undesirable task, and that knowledge irritated him the more. It was only

when he could be of some material use to him, as in the present instance, that his father took the least account of him. If he could bring himself to steal one of those precious documents, was his bitter reflection, and secrete it as some wretched slave secretes a diamond in the mines of Golconda, then, perhaps, and then only, he might be permitted to marry Margaret. For a bit of parchment with Shakespeare's name upon it, most certainly for a whole play in his handwriting, Mr. Samuel Erin would have bartered fifty nieces, and thrown his own soul into the bargain. Our young friend, however, was quite aware of what a poet of a later date would have told him, that 'an angry fancy' is a poor ware to go to market with : so, with as good a grace as he could, he put on his hat and accompanied Mr. Erin and his cicerone to Clopton House, which was but a few yards down the street.

It was a good-sized mansion of great antiquity, but had fallen into disrepair and even decay. Its present tenant, Mr. Williams, was a farmer in apparently far from prosperous circumstances. Half of the many chambers were in total darkness, the windows having been bricked up to save the window-tax, and the handsome old-world furniture was everywhere becoming a prey to the moth and the worm. As a matter of fact, however, these were not evidences of poverty. Mr. Williams had enough and to spare of worldly goods, only of some of them he did not think so much as other people of more cultivated taste would have done. A Warwickshire farmer of to-day would have considered many things as valuable in Clopton House which their unappreciative proprietor had relegated to the cock-loft. It was to that apartment indeed that Mr. Erin was led as soon as the nature of his inquiries, which he had stated generally, and to avoid suspicion of his actual object, to be concerning antiquities was understood. The room was filled with mouldering household goods of remote antiquity, chiefly of the time of Henry VII., in whose reign the proprietor of the house, Sir Hugh Clopton, had been Lord Mayor of London. Among other things, for example, there was an emblazoned representation on vellum of Elizabeth, Henry's wife, as she lay in state in the chapel of the Tower, where she died in child-birth.

'You may have that if you like,' said Mr. Williams to his visitor carelessly. He was a fat, coarse man, but very good-natured. 'For, being on vellum, it is no use to light the fire with.'

'You don't mean to say you light your fire with anything I see here?' gasped Mr. Erin.

‘Well, no, there’s nothing much left of that sort of rubbish ; we made a clean sweep of it all about a fortnight since.’

‘There were no old MSS., I hope?’

‘MSS. ! Heaps on ’em. They came from New Place at the time of the fire, you see, though Heaven knows why anyone should have thought them worth saving. They were all piled in that little room yonder, and as I wanted a place for some young partridges as I am bringing up, I burnt the whole lot of ’em.’

‘You looked at them first, of course, to make sure that there was nothing of consequence?’

‘Well, of course I did. I hope Dick Williams ain’t such a fool as to burn law documents. No, they were mostly poetry and that kind of stuff.’

‘But did you make certain about the handwriting? Else, my good sir, it might have been that of Shakespeare himself.’

‘Shakespeare! well, what of him? Why, there was bundles and bundles with his name wrote upon them. It was in this very fireplace I made a regular bonfire of them.’

There was a solitary chair in the little chamber, set apart for the partridges, into which Mr. Samuel Erin dropped, as though he had been a partridge himself, shot by a sportsman.

‘You—made—a—bonfire—of—Shakespeare’s—poems!’ he said, ejaculating the words very slowly and dejectedly, like minute guns. ‘May Heaven have mercy upon your miserable soul!’

‘I say,’ cried Mr. Williams, turning very red, ‘what the deuce do you mean by talking to me as if I was left for execution? What have I done? I’ve robbed nobody.’

‘You have robbed everybody—the whole world!’ exclaimed Mr. Erin excitedly. ‘In burning those papers you burnt the most precious things on earth. A bonfire, you call it! Nero, who fiddled while Rome was burning, was guiltless compared to you. You are a disgrace to humanity. Shakespeare had you in his eye, sir, when he spoke of “a marble-hearted fiend.”’

Mr. Samuel Erin had his favourite bard by heart, and was consequently in no want of ‘base comparisons,’ but he stopped a moment for want of breath. Annoyance and indignation had had the same effect upon Mr. Williams. He had never been ‘bally-ragged’ in his own house for ‘nothing’—except by his wife—before. Purple and speechless, he regarded his antagonist with protruding eyes, a human Etna on the verge of eruption.

Mr. John Jervis knew his man. Up to this point he had

taken no part in the controversy ; but he now seized Mr. Erin by the arm, and led him rapidly downstairs. Their last few steps were accomplished with dangerous velocity, for a flying body struck both of them violently on the back. This was William Henry, who, unable to escape the wild rush of the bull, had described a parabola in the air.

‘If there’s law in England, you shall smart for this,’ roared the infuriated animal over the banisters.

‘Perhaps I ought to have told you that Mr. Williams was of a hasty disposition,’ observed Mr. Jervis apologetically, when they found themselves in the street.

‘Hasty!’ exclaimed Mr. Erin, whose mind was much too occupied with sacrilege to concern himself with assault ; ‘a more thoughtless and precipitate idiot never breathed. The idea of his having burnt those precious papers ! I suppose, after what has happened, it would be useless to inquire just now whether any scrap of them has escaped the flames ; otherwise my son can go back——’

‘I am sure that wouldn’t do,’ interposed Mr. Jervis confidently.

William Henry breathed a sigh of relief. The impressions of Stratford-on-Avon seemed to him indelible ; they had left on him such ‘local colouring’ as time itself, he felt, could hardly remove. Fortunately for his *amour propre* not a word was said by his father of their reception at Clopton House. His whole mind was monopolised by the literary disappointment. The inconvenience that had happened to his son did not weigh with him a feather.

The whole party now proceeded to Mr. Jervis’s establishment, where the remains of the famous mulberry tree were kept in stock. Mr. Erin was haunted by the notion that some Shakesperean fanatic might step in and buy the whole of it before he could secure some mementoes, whereas the birthplace in Henley Street could ‘wait ;’ an idea at which, for the life of him, the proprietor of the sacred timber could not restrain a dry smile. It was the general opinion that enough tobacco stoppers, busts, and wafer seals had already been sold to account for a whole grove of mulberry trees. Mr. Erin was very energetic with his new acquaintance on the road, about precautions against fire (insurance against it was out of the question, of course), but when he had possessed himself of what he wanted, and the matter was again referred to as they came away, it was noticeable that he had not another word to say upon the side of prudence.

'He declaimed against Mr. Williams' rashness,' whispered William Henry to Margaret; 'but my belief is that he would now set fire to that timber yard without a scruple in order to render his purchases unique.'

Maggie held up her finger reprovingly, but her laughing eyes belied the gesture.

Both these young people indeed had far too keen a sense of fun to be enthusiasts.

To Mr. Hart the butcher (who at that time occupied the house in Henley Street) as an indirect descendant of the immortal bard, through his sister, Mr. Erin paid a deference that was almost servile. He examined his lineaments, in the hopes of detecting a likeness to the Chandos portrait, with a particularity that much abashed the object of his scrutiny, and even tried to get him to accompany him to the church that he might compare his features with those of the bust of the bard in the chancel.

But it was in the presence of the bust itself that Mr. Erin exhibited himself in the most characteristic fashion. Standing on what was to him more hallowed ground than any blessed by priests, and within a few feet of the ashes of his idol, he was nevertheless unable to restrain his indignation against the commentator Malone, through whose influence the coloured bust had recently been painted white. Instead of bursting into Shakespearean quotation, as it was his wont to do on much less provocation, he repeated with malicious gusto the epigram to which the act of vandalism in question had given birth:—

Stranger, to whom this monument is shown,
Invoke the poet's curses on Malone;
Whose meddling zeal his barbarous taste displays,
And daubed his tombstone as he marred his plays.

His rage, indeed, so rose at the spectacle, that for the present he protested that he found himself unable to pursue his investigations within the sacred edifice, and proposed that the party should start forthwith to visit Anne Hathaway's cottage at Shottery.

There was at present no more need for Mr. Jervis's services, so that gentleman was left behind. Mr. Erin and Frank Dennis led the way by the foot-path across the fields that had been pointed out to them, and William Henry and Margaret followed. It was a lovely afternoon; the trees and grass, upon which a slight shower had recently fallen, emitted a fragrance inexpressibly fresh. All

was quiet save for the song of the birds, who were giving thanks for the sunshine.

‘How different this is from Norfolk Street,’ murmured Margaret.

‘It is the same to me,’ answered her companion in a low tone, ‘because all that makes life dear to me is where you are. When you are not there, Margaret, I have no home.’

‘You should not talk of your home in that way,’ returned she reprovingly.

‘Yet you know it is the truth, Margaret; that there is no happiness for me under Mr. Erin’s roof, and that my very presence there is unwelcome to him.’

‘I wish you would not call your father Mr. Erin,’ she exclaimed reproachfully.

‘Did you not know, then, that he was not my father?’

‘What?’ In her extreme surprise she spoke in so loud a key that it attracted the attention of the pair before them. Mr. Erin looked back with a smile. ‘Shakespeare must have taken this walk a thousand times, Maggie,’ he observed.

She nodded and made some suitable reply, but for the moment she was thinking of things nearer home. She now remembered that she had heard something to the disadvantage of Mr. Erin’s deceased wife, one of those unpleasant remarks concerning someone connected with her which a modest girl hears by accident, and endeavours to forget. Until Mr. Erin had become a widower Margaret had never been permitted by her mother to visit Norfolk Street. Mrs. Erin had been a widow—a Mrs. Irwyn—but she had not become Mr. Erin’s wife at first because her husband had been alive. It was probable then that what William Henry had said was true; he was Mrs. Erin’s son, but not Mr. Erin’s, though he passed as such. This was doubtless the reason why her uncle and he were on such distant terms with one another, and why he never called him father. On the other hand it was no reason why her uncle should be so harsh with the young man, and treat him with such scant consideration. Some women would have despised the lad for the misfortune of his birth, but Margaret was incapable of an injustice; her knowledge of his unhappy position served to draw him closer to her than before.

By the blush that, in spite of her efforts to repress it, spread over her face, William Henry understood that she gave credit to his statement, and by the tones of her voice he felt that it had

done him no injury in her eyes. It was a matter, however, which, though necessary to be made plain, could not be discussed.

'What your uncle says is very true, Maggie,' he quietly remarked. 'This must have been Shakespeare's favourite walk, for love never goes by the high road when it can take the foot-path. The smell of that bean field, the odour of the hay of that very meadow, may have come to his nostrils as it comes to ours. His heart as he drew nigh to yonder village must have beat as mine beats, because he knew his love was near him.'

'There is the cottage,' cried Mr. Erin excitedly, pointing in front of him, and addressing his niece. 'Is it not picturesque, with its old timbers and its mossy roof?'

'It will make an excellent illustration for your book,' observed Frank Dennis the practical.

'It has been illustrated already pretty often,' returned the other drily, 'or we should not recognise it so easily.'

'Let us hope it's the right one,' muttered William Henry, 'for it will be poor I who shall suffer for it if it is not.'

Fortunately, however, there was no mistake. They stepped across the little brook, and stood in the garden with its well and its old-world flowers. Before them was the orchard 'for whispering lovers made,' and on the right the low vineclad cottage with the settle, or courting-seat, at its door.

Here Shakespeare came to win and woo his wife; whatever doubt may be thrown on his connection with any other dwelling that much is certain. On the threshold of the cottage Mr. Erin took off his hat, not from courtesy, for he was not overburdened with politeness, but from the same reverence with which he had doffed it at the church. He entered without noticing whether he was followed by the others or not. A descendant of Anne Hathaway's, though not of her name, received him; fit priest for such a shrine. That he had not read a line of Shakespeare in no way detracted from his sacred character. Frank Dennis, himself not a little moved, went in likewise. As Margaret was following him, William Henry gently laid his hand upon her wrist and led her to the settle, which was very ancient and worm-eaten.

'Sit here a moment, Maggie; this is the very seat, as Mr. Jervis tells me, on which Shakespeare sat with her who became his wife. Here on some summer afternoon like this, perhaps, he told her of his love.'

Margaret trembled, but sat down.

'It is amazing to think of it,' she said; 'he must have looked on to those same trees, and on this very well.'

'But he did not look at *them*, Maggie,' said the young man tenderly; 'he looked at the face beside him, as I am looking now, and I will wager that it was not so fair a face.'

'What nonsense you talk, Willie! Why do you not give yourself up as your—as Mr. Erin does—to the associations of the place? They are so interesting.'

'It's just what I am doing, dear Maggie. It was here they interchanged their vows; a different pair, indeed, though not altogether so superior, since to my mind you excel Anne Hathaway as much as I fall short of her marvellous bridegroom. That I am no Shakespeare is very true; yet it seems to me, Maggie, that when I say "I love you," even he could have said nothing more true and deep. I love you, I love you, I love you—do you hear me?' continued the young man passionately.

'You frighten me, Willie,' answered Maggie in trembling tones. 'And then it is so foolish, you know, that even if I said—what you would have me say—it could be of no use.'

'But you think it, you *think* it? That is all I ask,' urged the other earnestly. 'If matters were not as they are; if I got Mr. Erin's consent; if I had sufficient means to offer you a home—not indeed worthy of you, for then it must needs be a palace—but comfort, competence, you would not say "Nay"? Dearest Maggie, my own dear darling Maggie, give me hope. "The miserable," as Shakespeare tells us, "have no other medicine:" and I am very, very miserable; give me hope, the light of hope.'

'It would be a will-of-the-wisp, Willie.'

'No matter; I would bless it, if it led me to my grave. If I had it, I could work, I could win fortune, even fame perhaps. You doubt it? Try me, try me!' he continued vehemently, 'and if after some time, a little, little time, no harvest comes of it, and my brain proves barren, why then I will confess myself a dreamer; only in the meantime be mine in spirit; do not promise yourself to another; let us say a year; well then six months; you can surely wait six months for me, Maggie?'

'It would be six months of delusion, Willie.'

'Let it be so; a fool's paradise, but still for me a paradise. I have not had so many happy hours that fate should grudge me these. I know I am asking a strange thing; still I am not like those selfish lovers who, being in the same pitiful case with me as

to means, exact, like dogs-in-the-manger, vows of eternal fidelity from those whom they will, in all probability, be never in a position to wed. I ask you not for your heart, Maggie, but for the loan of it; for six months' grace, probation. If I fail to show myself worthy of you—if I fail to make a name—or rather to show the promise of making it within that time, then I return the loan. I do not say, as was doubtless said by him who sat here before me, "Be my wife!" I only say, "For six months to come, betroth yourself to no other man." Come, Maggie, Frank Dennis is not so very pressing.'

It was a dangerous card to play, this mention of his rival's name, but it won the game. Dennis was as true as steel, but through a modest mistrust of his own merits—a thing that did not trouble William Henry—he was a backward lover. He had had opportunities of declaring himself which he had neglected, thinking of himself too lowly, or that the time was not yet ripe; or preferring the hope that lies in doubt, to the despair that is begotten of denial; and this, I think, had a little piqued the girl. She liked him well enough, well enough even to marry him; but she liked William Henry better, and other things being equal, would have preferred him for a husband. They were not equal, but it was possible—just possible, for for the moment she had caught from her reputed cousin some of that confidence he felt in his own powers—that they might be made so. At all events six months was not a space to 'delve the parallels in beauty's brow;' and then it was so hard to deny him.

'You shall have your chance, Willie,' she murmured, 'though, as I have warned you, it is a very poor one.'

He drew her nearer to him, despite some pretence of resistance, and would have touched her cheek with his lips, when the cottage door was suddenly thrown open behind them and Mr. Erin appeared with an old chair in his hands, which he brandished like a quarterstaff above his head. He looked so flushed and excited that William Henry thought his audacious proposal had been overheard, and that he was about to be separated from his Margaret for ever, perhaps even by a violent death.

'It is mine! it is mine!' cried the antiquary triumphantly. 'I have bought Anne Hathaway's chair.'

CHAPTER VI.

AN AUDACIOUS CRITICISM.

IN the case of crime, every person who is concerned in its detection looks very properly to motive; the law, indeed, in its award of punishment, disregards it, but then, as a famous authority (and himself in authority), namely Mr. Bumble, observes, 'the law is a hass.' Where mankind falls into error is in looking for motive in all cases whether criminal or otherwise. A very large number of persons are actuated by causes for which motive is far too serious a term. They are often moved by sudden impulse, nay, even by whim or caprice, to take very important steps. When interrogated after the mischief has been done, as to why they did this or that, they reply, 'I don't know,' and are discredited. Yet, as a matter of fact, the motive was so slight, or rather so momentary (for it was probably strong enough while it lasted) that they have really forgotten all about it.

William Henry Erin, of whose character the world subsequently took a very different and erroneous view, was essentially a man of impulse. He had attributes, it is true, of another and even of an antagonistic kind. He was very punctual and diligent in his habits, he was neat and exact in his professional work; though a poet, his views of life, or at all events of his own position in it, were practical enough, yet he was impatient, passionate, and impulsive. His proposition to Margaret Slade had been made with such stress and energy that it was no wonder (albeit she knew his character better than most people) that she thought it founded upon some scheme for the future already formed in his own mind. Of its genuineness there could be no shadow of doubt, but she also took it for granted that he had some ground for expectation—which at all events to his own mind seemed solid—that within the space of time he had mentioned, something would occur to place him in a better social position. Her impression, or rather her apprehension (for she did not much believe in his literary talents, a circumstance, by the by, which showed that she was by no means over head and ears in love with him), was that he trusted to the publication of his poems to place him on the road to prosperity; his use of the words 'fame and fortune' certainly seemed to point to that direction, and what other road was there open to him?

Whereas, as a matter of fact, there was not even that poor half-penny-worth of substratum for his hopes. Circumstances—the finding himself alone with her he loved on Shakespeare's courting seat—had, of course, been the immediate cause of his amazing appeal, but they were also the chief cause. The knowledge that Frank Dennis was of the party and could gain her ear at any moment, with the certainty of Mr. Erin's advocacy to back him, had, moreover, made the young man madly jealous. To secure his beloved Margaret, even for a little while, from so dreaded a rival, was something gained; and then there was the chapter of accidents. We know not what a day may bring forth, how much less what may happen within six months! William Henry was but a boy, yet how many a grown man trusts to such contingencies! In the City, 'twenty-four hours to turn about in' is often considered time enough for a total change of fortune. It might be added that, unless Margaret should turn traitress and reveal his secret (which was impossible) he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by his delay, but to do the young man justice that idea had not entered into his mind. Passion with the bit between her teeth had run away with him.

As to precocity, it must be remembered that he lived in reckless days when men did not wait as they do now till they were five-and-forty years of age to marry; by that time, with enterprise and luck, many a gentleman was in the enjoyment of his third, or even his fourth honeymoon.

Still William Henry was not unconscious that he had taken an audacious step, and felt a genuine sense of relief on finding that Mr. Samuel Erin had provided himself in that arm-chair with a relic and not a weapon.

This invaluable acquisition—which, when it was brought to London, was placed on a little elevation made on purpose for it in his study, with a brass plate at its foot (after the manner of chairs in our Madame Tussaud's) with the words 'Anne Hathaway's Chair' upon it—had the effect of putting its possessor into good humour for the remainder of his stay at Stratford, a circumstance which had the happiest results for those about him. William Henry, for his part, was in the seventh heaven. It is not only our virtues which have the power of bestowing happiness upon us—at all events for a season. Shakespeare himself makes a striking observation on that matter in one of his sonnets; having spoken

plainly enough of certain errors, gallantries of which he has repented, he adds with an altogether unexpected frankness,

‘ But, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth.’

He does not put his tongue in his cheek at morality, far from it; but he rolls the sweet morsel, the remembrance of forbidden pleasure, under his tongue. It is one of the mistakes that our divines fall into to deny to our little peccadilloes any pleasure at all, whereas the fact is that the blossom of them is often very fair and fragrant, though the fruit is full of ashes, and, like the goodly apple, rotten at the core.

And thus it was with William Henry, who, without, indeed, having committed any great enormity, had certainly not been justified in obtaining the loan of his cousin's love; the consciousness of his temporary possession of it made a very happy man of him for a season. He made no ungenerous use of his advantage, he did not take an ell because he had gained an inch; but he hugged himself in that new-found sense of security as one basks in the summer sunshine. Those days at Stratford were the happiest days of his life. Considering the means by which they were obtained one can hardly apply to them the usual phrase ‘a foretaste of heaven;’ but they were happy days snatched from a life which was fated to hold few such. It was, perhaps, out of gratitude to him whose memory had helped him to this happiness, that the young man really began to take an interest in Shakespearean matters, and this again reacted to his advantage, since it gratified Mr. Erin, whose goodwill, difficult to gain by other means, was approached by that channel with extraordinary facility.

In association with Mr. Jervis the young man ransacked the little town for mementos of its patron saint, and was fortunate enough to discover a few, which, though of doubtful authenticity, were very welcome to the enthusiastic collector. If they were not the rose, *i.e.* actual relics, they were near the rose, as proximity is counted in such cases. No doubt it is the same with more sacred relics—in a deficiency of toe-nails of any particular saint it must be something, though not of course so rapturous, to secure a toe-nail of some saint in the next century. As regards Shakespeare, it is certainly one of the marvels in connection with that marvellous man that not a scrap of his handwriting, save his autograph, of one who wrote so much ever turns up to reward the pains of the

searcher, nay, there is only one letter extant, even of those that were written to him—a commonplace request for a loan from the man who afterwards became his son-in-law; under which circumstances, when one comes to think about it, there may be some excuse for the language used by Mr. Samuel Erin to that reckless incendiary Mr. Williams, of Clopton House.

If to be indifferent, as William Henry had been suspected of being, to the charms of Shakespeare was a crime in Mr. Erin's eyes, it may be easily imagined how he resented the least imputation of any portion of his idol having been composed of clay. There were circumstances connected with his union with Anne Hathaway, and also of that little adventure of his with Justice Shallow's deer, which were dangerous to allude to in Mr. Erin's presence, and if the moral qualities of his hero (albeit, we may have gathered, Mr. Erin was himself, though Protestant, by no means Puritan) could not in safety be called in question, any suggestion of weakness in him as a writer was still more unendurable. Nevertheless, even prudent Frank Dennis contrived to put his foot in it in this very matter, and thereby narrowly escaped falling out of Mr. Erin's good graces for the term of his natural life. It was during an expedition to Charlecote; the little party, having left their vehicle at the gate, were walking through the park, Mr. Erin wrapped in contemplation—endeavouring perhaps to identify the very oak (in 'As You Like It') where the poor sequestered stag had 'come to languish'—while the young people a few paces behind were indulging in a little quiet banter upon the forbidden subject of deer-stealing.

'I suppose that he did steal that deer?' observed Margaret slyly in a hushed whisper.

'There is not a doubt of it,' answered Frank, 'he had to fly from Stratford to London for that very reason, to get out of Sir Thomas's way.'

'Nay, nay,' put in William Henry, I am afraid with some slight imitation of his father's solemn manner when dealing with the sacred topic; 'let us not say steal, it was what "the wise do call convey." We do a good deal of it in New Inn ourselves.'

'Yonder are our "velvet friends,"' said Mr. Erin, pointing to a herd of deer in the distance.

The allusion caused some trepidation in his companions, as chiming in only too opportunely with their late disloyal remarks,

and it was much to their relief that Mr. Erin proceeded, as was his wont, to indulge himself in quotation.

‘And indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leather coat
Almost to bursting; and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase.’

‘What a graphic picture! “His innocent nose.” Who but Shakespeare would have dared to write “his innocent nose”?’

‘Very true, sir,’ said William Henry gravely. “His innocent nose.”’

Not a muscle of his face betrayed the drollery within him. He certainly possessed some tricks of the actor’s trade. Margaret stooped to pluck a daisy, an action which sufficed to account for the colour rushing to her cheeks. Frank Dennis, whose wits were not of the nimble sort, fitted for such sudden emergency, felt he was about to suffocate. It seemed to him he had no alternative between speech—the act of saying something, no matter what—and an explosion.

‘With regard to deer shedding tears,’ he observed, ‘I have a friend who is a great naturalist, who tells me, as a matter of fact, that they can’t do it.’

‘Can’t do what?’ inquired Mr. Erin curtly.

‘He says that from the peculiar formation of the ducts of the deer, or perhaps from the absence of them—I know nothing about the matter myself, sir,’ put in the unhappy Frank precipitately, for the antiquary was looking daggers at him.

‘You know quite as much about it as your friend, then,’ thundered Mr. Erin. ‘Great Heavens! that a man like him, or you, or anybody, should venture to pick a hole in one of the noblest descriptions of the language: to find faults in Shakespeare himself! You remind me, sir, of the sacrilegious fellow in France, the other day, who gave it as his opinion that if he had been present at the Creation, he could have suggested improvements.’

‘But, indeed, sir, it was not my opinion.’

‘It is quite as bad to quote those of infamous persons as to originate them yourself.’

Mr. Frank Dennis had very little of the serpent in him, not even its prudence; his sense of justice was shocked by this outrageous speech.

‘But it is a mere question of fact and science——’

‘Science,’ interrupted the other vehemently, ‘that is the argument of the Atheist against the Scriptures. Science, indeed! what is science when compared with the genius of Shakespeare?’



He told you, sir, that deer shed tears, and if they don't, why—damn their eyes—they ought to!’

The argument was, at least, conclusive; nothing more remained to be said, or was said. Mr. Erin stalked on like a turkey cock ruffled; his idol had been insulted, and he felt that he had done

well to be angry. Every deer he saw stimulated his wrath. 'Confound the fellow,' he murmured, as he passed the antlered herd, 'it would serve him right if they tossed him.' It even crossed his mind perhaps that Margaret was right after all in receiving Dennis' attentions so coldly; that he was certainly a very pig-headed young man.

Frank Dennis, too, good-natured as he was, was not a little put out. For the moment he felt almost as disrespectful towards Shakespeare as Sydney Smith's friend was to the Equator; but his eye fell on Margaret, and he put a bridle on his tongue.

His sense of annoyance soon faded away, but with the anti-quary it was not so easily effaced. This incident was of considerable advantage to William Henry and his little plan. In a company of three, when one of them has fallen out of our favour, one naturally rather 'cottons' to the other, if it is only to show the offender what he has forfeited by his misconduct; and from thenceforward Mr. Erin showed himself at least less severe towards the young man who bore his name. Nay, what was of more consequence, the symptoms he had exhibited of favouring Frank Dennis' pretensions to his niece's hand manifestly slackened; he no longer troubled himself to throw the young people together. On the other hand, though of course with no idea that there was risk in it (for he both despised him and 'despised his youth'), he suffered William Henry and Margaret to 'foregather' as much as they pleased. He still felt so resentful to Frank's sacrilegious ideas as respected the customs of deer when under emotion, that it was distasteful to him to be shut up with him as a companion, and in order to mitigate his society he took an inside place for William Henry (notwithstanding that, except in the matter of MSS. and first editions, he had a frugal mind) in the coach to town.

CHAPTER VII.

A COLLECTOR'S GRATITUDE.

THE effects of a prolonged holiday upon the human mind are various. Like other things much 'recommended by the faculty,' it does not suit everyone. It is the opinion of an eminent physician of my acquaintance that little comes of it in the way of wholesomeness except sunburn; and that when that wears off the

supposed convalescent looks as he feels—satiated and jaded. To William Henry, the conveyancer's clerk, that week or two at Stratford-on-Avon was what the long vacation is to many lawyers. He found a great difficulty in setting to work again at his ordinary duties. His fellow clerk had left his employer's service, so that he had his room to himself—a circumstance that became of much more importance than he had at that time any idea of—but business was slack at Mr. Bingley's office. The young fellow had plenty of leisure, though among old mortgage deeds and titles to estates, it might be thought he had small opportunities of spending it pleasantly. Under ordinary circumstances this would not, however, have been the case with him. He had been brought up in an atmosphere of antiquity; the satisfaction expressed by his father at the acquisition of any ancient rarity had naturally impressed itself upon his mind; the only occasions on which he had won his praise had been on his bringing home for his acceptance some old tract or pamphlet from a bookstall; and in time he had learnt to have some appreciation of such things for their own sake, albeit, like some dealer in old china, without much reverence. His turn for poetry, such as it was, was due, perhaps, to the many old romances and poems in Mr. Erin's library rather than to any natural bent in that direction; a circumstance, indeed, which was pretty evident from the young poet's style, for style is easy enough to catch, whereas ideas must come of themselves. His holiday had grievously unsettled him. He had brought back his dream with him, but, once more face to face with the facts of life, he perceived the many obstacles to its realisation. The only legitimate road to success—that of daily duty—would never lead thither; but there might be a short cut to it through his father's favour. Hitherto he had sought this by fits and starts to mitigate his own condition; he now resolved to cultivate it unintermittingly, and at any sacrifice.

He consequently devoted all his spare time (and 'by our lady,' as his father would have said, also some of his employer's) to the discovery of some precious MS. Instead of the spectacled and weazened faces which they were wont to see poring over their old wares, the bookstall-keepers of the city began to be haunted by that of William Henry, eager and young. They could not understand what his bright eyes came to seek, and certainly never dreamed that it was love that had sent him there—to my mind a very touching episode, reminding one of the difficult and uncouth tasks to

which true knights in the days of romance were put to, in order to show their worthiness to win those they wooed. The lady of his affections, however, was far from being sanguine of his success; she could hardly fail to appreciate his exertions, but she refrained from encouraging them. 'My dear Willie,' she said, 'it is painful to me to see you occupied in a search so fruitless. It is only too probable that what you seek has absolutely no existence. It is like hunting for the elixir of life, or the secret of turning base metals into gold.'

'But, my dear Maggie, some such literary treasure *may* exist,' he answered tenderly, 'and if I can discover it, what is the elixir of life to me will be found with it.'

It was impossible to reason with a young man like this, and Margaret tried to comfort herself with the reflection that his madness had but five months more to run. But it was very, very difficult. Her life was now far from being a cheerful one. She was not so vain as to take pleasure in a wasted devotion, and she bitterly repented of the momentary weakness that had inclined her to feed its flame.

The house in Norfolk Street was more frequented by the learned than ever. They came to discuss Mr. Erin's late visit to the Shakespearean shrine, just as faithful Moslems might come to interview some pious friend who had recently made his pilgrimage to Mecca. While they talked of relics and signatures her mind reverted to the sweet-smelling old garden at Shottery, with its settle outside the cottage door. Frank Dennis came as usual, and was made welcome by his host, if not quite with the same heartiness as of old. Not a word of love passed his lips, and he was even more reserved and silent than of yore; but Margaret could not conceal from herself what he came for. Nay, his very reticence had a significance for her; she had a suspicion that he had noticed some change of manner between herself and her cousin which for the present sealed his lips. When he had quite convinced himself that her heart was in another's keeping she felt that he would go away, and that place by the window, where he usually sat a little apart from the antiquarian circle, would know him no more. She pitied him as she pitied Willie, though in another way. She recognised in him some noble qualities—gentleness, modesty, a love of truth and justice, and a generosity of heart that extended even to a rival. If she had not known William Henry, it might have been possible to her, she sometimes

thought, to have loved Frank Dennis. But this was only when the former was not present. At the end of the day, when her cousin came in fagged and dispirited and took his place at the supper table with little notice from any one, her whole soul seemed to go forth to meet him in her tender eyes.

Matters thus continued for some weeks till, rather suddenly, a change took place in William Henry. In some respects it was not for the better; the unrest which his features had hitherto displayed disappeared, and was succeeded by an earnest and almost painful gravity. Once only she had seen such an expression—on the face of a juggler in the street, one evening, who had thrown knives into the air and caught them as they fell. But with it there was a certain new-born hope. She recognised it in the looks he stole at her when he thought himself unobserved, and in his talk and manner to others, especially to Mr. Erin. They suggested confidence, or at least a purpose. That he said nothing of what he had in his mind to her was in itself significant. The conclusion she drew was that he was on the track of some discovery which might or might not prove of great importance. Poor fellow! She had too often seen her uncle and his friends led by wildfire of this sort to the brink of disappointment to put much faith in it. They were old and used to failures, and with a little grunt of disappointment settled their wigs upon their foreheads and started off again at a jog trot in search of another mare's nest. Whereas to Willie—he was but seventeen—Repulse would seem like Ruin.

One evening—it was a Saturday, on which day Mr. Erin was accustomed to entertain a few friends of his own way of thinking—William Henry made his appearance later than usual. The guests had already sat down to table and were in full tide of talk, which was not in any way interrupted by his arrival. Margaret as usual cast a swift furtive glance at him, and at once perceived that something had happened. His face was pale, even paler than usual, but his eyes were very bright and restless; a peculiar smile played about his mouth. 'He has found something' was the thought that flashed at once across her mind. Even if he had, she felt it would not really alter matters, and would only tend to nourish false hopes. Her uncle's heart would never soften towards him in the way that he hoped for. A compelled expression of approbation, an unwilling tribute to his diligence and judgment, born of self-congratulation on the acquisition of some literary

treasure, would be his reward at best, but still—but still—her heart went pit-a-pat. She knew that no good fortune of the ordinary kind could have happened to him. Mr. Bingley, though he liked the boy, could hardly have promised to make him his partner; nor indeed, if he had, would it have mattered much, since his business was so small as to require but a single clerk. That he had found a publisher for his poems was not less unlikely, while the result of such a miracle would be of even less material advantage.

Throughout the meal William Henry scarcely touched bit or sup; his air, to the one observer of it, gave the impression of intense but suppressed excitement.

It was the custom of Mr. Erin's company on Saturday nights to share after supper a bowl of punch between them, and for those who affected tobacco to light up their long clays. Both the drinking and smoking were of a very moderate kind, while of song-singing, very common at that date, there was none. There was only one toast, given by the host in reverent tones, 'To the memory of the immortal Shakespeare,' and then they began to wrangle over disputed readings. On these occasions it was William Henry's habit to quietly withdraw and seek Margaret in the withdrawing-room. As often as not, Frank Dennis did the like, when he would petition for a tune on the harpsichord, a thing the other never did. Margaret's voice was music enough for him, especially in a *tête-à-tête*. But on this particular Saturday both young men remained with the rest, William Henry for a reason of his own, and Dennis out of courtesy to his host, who had promised to give his friends that night an antiquarian treat consisting of the exhibition of a rare tract he had recently acquired. It was entitled 'Stokes, the Vaulting Master,' and full of engraved plates, to the outsider as destitute of interest as dinner-plates with nothing on them, but to this little band of antiquarians as the 'meat' of turtle to an alderman. If they didn't say grace afterwards it was because this precious gift had been vouchsafed to another and not to themselves; they sighed and murmured to themselves that 'Erin ought to be a happy man.' Having received their compliments with much complacency, their host, like an old man congratulated upon the possession of a young wife, locked the extract in his bookcase and put the key in his pocket, which was taken by the rest as a signal for departure. When they had all gone save Dennis, who, as a friend of the house, was always the last to go, William Henry drew from his breast-

pocket a piece of parchment with two seals hanging from it on slips.

'I think, sir,' said he modestly, 'I have something rather curious to show you.'

'Eh, what?' said Mr. Erin, knitting his brow in the depreciating manner peculiar to the examiner of all curios before purchase, 'some old deed or another, I suppose.'

Then he turned very white and eager, and sat down with the document spread out before him. It was a note of hand of the usual kind, though of ancient date, and dealing with a very small sum of money; but if it had been a letter from a solicitor's office acquainting him with the fact that he had been bequeathed ten thousand pounds it could not have aroused in him greater interest and astonishment.

It was as follows:—'One month from the date hereof I doe promyse to paye to my good and worthy friend John Hemynge the sum of five pounds and five shillings, English Moneye, as a recompense for his great trouble in settling and doinge much for me at the Globe Theatre, as also for hys trouble in going down for me to Stratford.—Witness my hand,

'September the Nynth, 1589. 'WILLIAM SHAKESPERE.'

'Received of Master William Shakespeare the sum of five pounds and five shillings, good English Money, this Nynth day of October, 1589. 'JOHN HEMYNGE.'

'This is indeed a most marvellous discovery, William Henry,' said Mr. Erin, breaking a long silence, and regarding his son with a sort of devout amazement, such as might have been exhibited by some classic shepherd of old on finding the Tityrus he had been treating as a chawbacon was first cousin to Apollo. 'You are certainly a most fortunate young man.—Maggie,' for Maggie, learning that the visitors had departed, had joined them, full of vague expectancy, 'see what your cousin has brought home with him.'

This appeal of Mr. Erin to his niece was significant in many ways. It would have been most natural in such a matter to have turned to Dennis, but for the moment he could not brook incredulity, nor even a critical examination of the precious manuscript. Moreover, he had said, 'your cousin,' a relationship between the two young people to which he had never before alluded. It was plain that within the last five minutes William Henry had come nearer to the old man's heart than he had been able to get in seventeen years.

What followed was even still more expressive, for it took for granted an intimacy between his son and niece, which up to that moment he had studiously ignored.

‘Did you know anything,’ he added, ‘my girl, of this surprise which your cousin had in store for us?’

‘I knew that there was something, uncle, though not from his lips. That is,’ she continued with a faint flush, ‘I felt for days that there has been something upon William Henry’s mind, which I judged to be good news. Was it not so, Willie?’

The young man bowed his head. The colour came into his face also. ‘How she must have watched him, and how rightly she had read his thoughts!’ was what he was saying to himself.

Mr. Erin took no notice of either of them; his mind had reverted to the new-found treasure.

‘Look at it, Dennis,’ he cried. ‘The seals and paper are quite as they should be. I have no doubt of its being a genuine deed of the time. Then the signature—there are only two others in all the world, but I do think—just take this microscope (his own hand trembled so that he could scarcely hold it)—there can be no mistake about it. It is without the “a,” but it can be proved that he spelt it indifferently; and again, the receipt *has* the “a,” an inconsistency which, in the case of a forgery, would certainly not have been overlooked. There can be no doubt of its being a genuine signature, can there?’

‘That is a matter on which you are infinitely better qualified to judge than I am, Mr. Erin,’ was the cautious rejoinder. ‘Perhaps you had better consult the autograph in Johnson and Steevens’s edition.’

‘Tush! Do you suppose that I have not every stroke and turn of it in my mind’s eye? Reach down the book, Maggie.’

Margaret, who knew where to lay her hand upon every book in her uncle’s library, made haste to produce the volume.

‘There, did not I tell you?’ said Mr. Erin triumphantly. ‘Look at the *W*, look at the *S*.’

Dennis did look at them very carefully. ‘Yes,’ he admitted, ‘there is no doubt that they are facsimiles.’

‘Facsimiles!’ exclaimed the old man angrily; ‘why not frankly say that they are by the same hand at once?’

‘But that is begging the whole question,’ argued Dennis, his honest and implastic nature leading him into the self-same error into which he had fallen at Charlecote Park. ‘It is surely more

likely upon the whole that an autograph purporting to be Shakespeare's should be a facsimile than an original.'

'Or, in other words,' answered Mr. Erin, with a burst of indignation, 'it is more likely that this lad here, poor William Henry' (the 'poor' sounded almost like 'poor dear'), 'should have imposed upon us than not.'

'Oh no, oh no,' interposed Margaret, earnestly; 'I am sure that Mr. Dennis never meant to suggest that.'

'Then what the deuce did he mean by his facsimile?' ejaculated the antiquary with irritation. 'Look at the up-strokes; look at the down-strokes.'

'You have made an accusation against me, Mr. Erin,' said Frank Dennis, speaking under strong emotion, 'which is at once most cruel and undeserved. If I thought myself capable of doing an injury to William Henry, or especially of sowing any suspicion of him in your mind, I—I would go and drown myself in the river yonder.'

Mr. Erin only said, 'Umph,' in such a tone that it sounded like 'Then go and do it.'

'How is it possible that in throwing any doubt upon the genuineness of that document,' continued the other, 'I should be imputing anything to its finder? Nor, indeed, have I cast any doubt on it. I know nothing about it.'

'Then why offer an opinion?' put in the old man implacably.

'At all events, sir, I hazarded none as to how the thing came into William Henry's possession.'

'Tut, tut,' replied the antiquary, once more reverting to the precious document, 'who cares how he got it? The point is that we have it here; not only Shakespeare's handwriting, but a most incontestible proof, to such as ever doubted it, of his honour and punctuality in discharge of his just debts. William Henry, I have been mistaken in you, my lad. I will honestly confess that I had built no such hopes upon you. When I lost my poor Samuel [a son that died in infancy], I never thought to be made happy by anything a boy could do again. This is the proudest moment of my life—to have under my own roof, to see with my own eyes, to touch with my own fingers, the actual handwriting of William Shakespeare.'

Then, with a sigh like one who returns to another something he fain would keep, as knowing far more how to value it, he folded up the document, and returned it to William Henry.

'Nay, sir,' said the lad, gently breaking silence for the first time, 'it is yours, not mine. My pleasure in acquiring it—for, to say the truth, it cost me nothing—would all be lost if you refused to accept it.'

'What, as a gift? No, my boy, that is impossible. I don't mean that you must take cash for it,' for William Henry looked both abashed and disturbed, 'but something that will at least show you that I am not ungrateful.'

For one wild instant the young man believed that, like a stage father, Mr. Erin was about to place Margaret's hand in his and dower them with his blessing, but he only walked to his bookcase, and took from the shelf, where it had just been reverently laid, 'Stokes, the Vaulting Master,' and pushed it into his hands.

'But, sir, you have not heard how I gained possession of the deed,' exclaimed the astonished recipient of this treasure.

'To-morrow, to-morrow,' answered the antiquary as he left the room with the document hugged to his heart; 'to-morrow will be time enough for details.'

In his heart of hearts he feared lest there should be some flaw in the young man's story which might throw discredit upon the genuineness of his discovery: and, for that night at least, he wished to enjoy his acquisition without the shadow of a doubt.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW TO GET RID OF A COMPANY.

WHEN Mr. Erin had closed the door behind him there was silence among those he had left; Dennis and Margaret naturally looked to William Henry for an explanation of so singular a scene, but he only turned over the leaves of 'Stokes, the Vaulting Master,' with an amused expression of countenance.

'This reminds me,' he observed presently, 'of what one of Mr. Bingley's female clients did the other day. She had a favourite cat, which one of her toadies used to extol in order to curry favour with her; and when she died she left him *that* as being the richest legacy she could think of; her mere money went to a hospital.'

Margaret gave him a look which seemed to reproach him for his frivolity, and Dennis remarked gravely enough, 'I do hope

there is no mistake about that deed of yours, my lad; for I am afraid it would be a terrible blow to your father.'

'Deed of mine!' exclaimed the young man indignantly. 'How on earth can I tell whether it is genuine or not?'

'That is very true,' said Margaret, 'how can he? We must hope for the best. Now tell us where you found it, Willie, and all about it.'

'Well, it's a queer story, I promise you, and I can only give you my word of honour for the truth of it.'

'I should hope that would be enough,' said Margaret confidently.

'It will be enough for you, Maggie,' said the young man quietly, 'but I am very doubtful whether it will be sufficient for others, since even to myself it would still seem like a dream save for the documentary evidence. If that is right, as Mr. Erin seems to think, all is right.'

'And for that you are not responsible,' put in Margaret eagerly.

'Just so; I know no more about it being Shakespeare's genuine signature than you do. How the thing came into my hands was this way. You know the Horn Tavern in Fleet Street, Dennis?'

'Well, of course. Did I not dine with you ten days ago there?'

'Nay; let us be accurate throughout. I dined with *you*,' said the young man smiling. 'And that reminds me of what I had forgotten before; it was on that very day that I first met my friend. Did you notice an old gentleman with a flaxen wig dining by himself in the corner—indeed, I know you did, for we remarked that it was rather early in the day for a man to be drinking port?'

'I remember your making the observation,' answered Dennis; 'but I cannot recall the gentleman; I did not notice him with any particularity.'

'Nor I. But it seems that he noticed *me*. I took my mid-day meal there the next day, and there he was again. We sat at adjoining tables and he entered into conversation with me. His manner was at first a little stiff and reticent, like that of an old bachelor who lives alone; but something I said about Child's bank seemed to attract his attention. He was not aware that the accounts for the sale of Dunkirk had been found among their papers; and seemed more astonished that I should know it. Again, it amazed him to find that I knew about Chaucer's having beaten the Franciscan Friar in Fleet Street. Being ignorant, of course,

of the set of people I have been brought up amongst here, it doubtless astonished him that so young a man should take any interest in such matters. He said he was but an indifferent antiquary himself, from an incurable habit of indolence, which had grown upon him during years of seclusion, but that his tastes had at one time lain in that direction; that he possessed a considerable collection of manuscripts bequeathed to him by a cousin, and that if I liked to look in upon him at his chambers, in the Temple, I might perhaps find something worthy of my attention.

‘Of course, I availed myself of this invitation. I found my friend in an unusually large set of chambers, but which had the appearance of great neglect. The rooms he occupied himself were well cared for enough, though he informed me that he saw no company; but the others were used as lumber rooms. They were filled with old books, old armour, old manuscripts, piled up on the floor in the greatest confusion. There were heaps of law documents, relating to his own affairs, which had no better treatment. I suppose my new friend saw by the expression of my face that I thought him a very eccentric personage, for he suddenly observed, “I have taken a strong fancy to you, young gentleman, and I am not easily pleased; but there is one thing which you must beware of if you want our friendship to continue. I cannot be troubled with questions. The man who left me all these things was worried to death by the curiosity of other people. ‘Where did you get this? How did that come into your hands?’ and so on. There are some things here, my possession of which would be so envied by some people, that I should never have a moment’s peace from their importunities. If you should come across any such treasure and should reveal the place where you found it, you and I part company. Let that be thoroughly understood between us.” Of course I promised never to mention his name or address to anyone.’

As William Henry paused a moment to take breath, ‘That will be rather awkward,’ observed Dennis gravely; ‘of course, there was no help for it, but your inability to give a reference as to the discovery of the deeds will give rise to suspicion.’

‘Suspicion of what?’ inquired Margaret with a flush on her cheek.

‘Of the authenticity of the document. I should rather have said would strengthen suspicion, for that there will be objectors to it is certain.’

'My cousin has nothing to do with them,' said Margaret; 'surely he is not personally answerable for the genuineness of the deed.'

'Certainly not,' answered Dennis gently.

'Pray go on, Willie,' said Margaret. It was plain that what Dennis had said had annoyed her in some way; not only was he himself, however, quite unconscious of the cause of offence, but William Henry appeared equally in the dark. He glanced from one to the other with a puzzled look before he took up his tale.

'I have paid several visits to the Templar, as I will call him, since then, and he has been most kind and hospitable. As my time is not my own and I can only occasionally leave the office, he has lent me a latch-key so that I may enter his chambers when I please, and pursue my researches. In order, as I believe, to remove from me any unpleasant sense of obligation, he has asked me to catalogue his library for him; which is, of course, a labour of love.'

'Why, my good lad, it is evident the old gentleman intends to adopt you, and will make you his heir,' exclaimed Dennis.

Though he spoke laughingly, Margaret thought to herself that such an event was by no means out of the range of possibility. Her cousin was certainly very attractive; had excellent manners, and, as it happened, the somewhat exceptional tastes that were most likely to recommend him to such a patron. Perhaps the future that Willie had proposed to her in the garden at Shottery might not turn out so wild a dream after all.

'I think my new friend has done enough for me as it is,' said William Henry modestly. 'In turning over some deeds yesterday I found that document which I brought home to-night. Mr. —, I mean the Templar—was not at home, so that I had to wait till I could see him this afternoon. You may imagine what a twenty-four hours I passed.'

'I noticed, as I told my uncle, that you had something on your mind,' said Margaret; 'but that has been for some days. No doubt it was this making acquaintance with your new friend and the possibilities that might arise from it.'

'No doubt. I confess I allowed myself to indulge in certain hopes,' returned the young man with a smile, but keeping his eyes fixed on the ground. 'What has happened, however—always supposing that the document is genuine—has been far beyond my expectations. When I met my patron and told him what I had found he was surprised enough, but by no means in that state of

elation which we have just seen in Mr. Erin ; the reason of which was, I am convinced, that he at once made up his mind to give me the thing.

“It is very curious,” he said. “My cousin always set great store by those old manuscripts, but I did not know there was anything among them so interesting as this. Perhaps you may find some more ; at all events, since but for you this discovery would certainly not have been made, or at least not in my lifetime, it is but fair that you should reap the benefit of it. This note of hand is yours.”

‘What a gracious gentleman !’ exclaimed Margaret enthusiastically. ‘It was not as if he did not know the value of what he was giving away.’

‘Just so. I am afraid, though I begged him to reconsider the matter, that I was not very urgent that he should do so. I could not help picturing to myself how Mr. Erin would receive such a treasure, and how it might be the means’—here he hesitated a moment—‘of—making myself more acceptable to him.’

Dennis patted the lad on the shoulder approvingly. He understood that in his presence it was painful to the young fellow to allude to his father’s habitually cold and unpaternal behaviour. What he did not understand was that William Henry should resent this friendly encouragement as being the manner of a mature man to a junior.

Margaret for her part attributed her cousin’s hesitation to another cause. She felt that if they had been alone together he would have ended that last sentence—‘how it might be the means of’—in a different way.

‘In the end, of course,’ continued William Henry, smiling, ‘I took what the gods had given me without much scruple, but even if nothing more should come of it, I hope I shall never forget the old gentleman’s kindness.’

Nothing under the circumstances could be more moderate or in better taste than the speaker’s manner. Not only was there no exultation, such as might easily have been excused in a man so young, and, moreover, so unaccustomed to good fortune, but he seemed to have resolutely determined not to encourage himself in expectation ; and yet there was a confidence in his tone which to one at least of those who listened to him was very significant. If it is too much to say that pretty Margaret had repented of that promise given to her cousin at Anne Hathaway’s cottage, she had

certainly thought it very unhopeful; or rather it would be more correct to say she had abstained from thinking of its possible results at all; but that night she could not shut them out from her dreams.

Mr. Samuel Erin would probably have also had his dreams—not less agreeable, though of quite another kind—but unfortunately he never went to sleep. Like Belshazzar he beheld all night a writing on the wall, which, albeit it was not in modern characters, needed in his case no interpreter. It was Shakespeare's autograph. It seemed to him to be inscribed everywhere, and, as though the secret of luminous paint had already been discovered, to shine miraculously out of the darkness.

He came down to the morning meal with a face of unwonted paleness, but which, when it turned to William Henry, wore also an unwonted smile. He listened to his narration of how he became possessed of the deed with interest, but without much comment, and yet not a word did he say about the precious document itself. His silence, however, was well understood. There would that day be a gathering of his Shakespeare friends, who would decide upon its genuineness; but in the meantime it was clear that he had a firm and cheerful faith in it such as men pray for so often in vain. For the first time for years he addressed his conversation almost wholly to his son, and even recalled events connected with the young man's childhood. On later matters perhaps it was scarcely safe to venture, lest memories of a less cheerful kind should be raked up with them.

'Do you remember, my boy, the days when we were wont to spout Macbeth together, and how you had to hold up the paper-knife in your little hand and say, "Is this a dagger that I see before me?"'

William Henry remembered them very well, and said so. It was curious enough that Shakespeare should be the one common ground they had discovered on which to meet on terms of amity.

Then presently, 'Have you heard anything of young Talbot lately?'

Talbot had been that schoolfellow of William Henry already spoken of, who was a poetaster like himself. More fortunate, however, in worldly circumstances, he had succeeded to a small estate in Ireland, where he lived, save when he occasionally came to London for a week or two for pleasure. On one occasion William Henry had ventured to bring the young man to Norfolk

Street, but he had been received with such scant civility by the master of the house that the visit had not been repeated. That Mr. Erin should have given himself the trouble to recall his name spoke volumes of Shakespearean autograph.

'Thank you, sir; Talbot is to be in town for a few days at the Blue Bear in the Strand, I believe.'

'I beg if you see him, then, that you will give him my compliments,' said Mr. Erin graciously.

The transformation was quite magical. It was as though some humble wight dwelling in the shadow of King Bulcinoso's displeasure had suddenly become first favourite, and, instead of receiving buffets, had been given his Majesty's hand to kiss.

Margaret had never liked her uncle so much as in this new character, and was indignant with her cousin that he did not respond to his father's kindness with more enthusiasm.

'If he had behaved so to me, Willie, I should have met him half way,' she afterwards said reprovingly.

'Yes,' answered the young man gravely, 'because you would have known that he loved you for your own sake.' Then with a gentle sigh he added, 'Why don't you meet *me* half way, Maggie?'

She did not indeed reply as he would have had her, but her tender glance betrayed that if she had not got half way, she was on the road to meet him.

He went away to his work as usual, but by no means in his usual frame of mind. Nor were those he left behind him less moved by his late proceedings than himself.

Before midday the parlour in Norfolk Street was the reception room of quite a throng of dilettanti, some summoned that very morning by Mr. Erin's special invitation. The new-found deed was handed round among these enthusiasts as a new-born babe, heir to millions, but about whom there are some doubts as to its legitimacy, might be received by a select circle of female gossips, while the proprietor, like a husband confident in his wife's fidelity, regards their investigations with a complacent smile. They examined it tenderly but with great caution, through spectacles of every description, and in silence befitting so momentous an occasion; yet by their countenances, lit by a certain 'fearful joy,' it was easy to see that upon the whole they were satisfied—nay gluttoned—by the inspection.

'Well, gentlemen?' inquired Mr. Erin with mock humility—a

mere pretence of submission to a possible adverse opinion. 'What say you, my dear Sir Frederick, what is your verdict?'

He had appealed to one Sir Frederick Eden, a Shakespearean critic of no mean distinction, and who, being the only titled per-



son present, might naturally be considered as the foreman of the jury.

'It is my opinion, Mr. Erin,' replied that gentleman with great solemnity, 'that this most interesting document is valid.'

A hushed murmur of corroboration and applause broke from

the little throng. 'That is my view also,' said one; 'And mine,' 'And mine,' added other voices.

If Mr. Erin had just been elected King of Great Britain and Ireland (with the Empire of India thrown in by anticipation), and was receiving the first act of allegiance from the representatives of the nation, he could not have looked more gratified and serene.

'That is certainly the conclusion,' he observed with modesty, 'which I myself have arrived at.'

Then he told how William Henry had become possessed of the document, a narration which redoubled their interest and excitement.

'Sir,' said Sir Frederick with emotion, 'I felicitate you on the possession of such a son.'

There were reasons, as we know, which made this congratulation a mere matter of compliment, and, up to this time, by no means an acceptable one; but it was with no little pride and satisfaction that Mr. Erin now acknowledged it.

'He is a good lad,' he said, 'a discreet and well-ordered lad; and, of course, it is very gratifying to me that he has found favour in the eyes of this gentleman—whoever he may be—to whom we are indebted for this—this manifestation.'

It was a strange word to use, but, under the circumstances, not an inappropriate one. To Mr. Samuel Erin the occurrence in question seemed little less than a miracle, and William Henry the instrument through which it had been vouchsafed to his wondering eyes.

'What we have to consider,' he continued, dropping his voice in hushed solemnity, 'is that, in all probability, other papers connected with the immortal bard may be produced from the same source.'

The company nodded their wigs in unison. It was as though in their mind's eye a dish of peaches had been placed on the table before them; their very mouths watered.

'There is one circumstance,' said Sir Frederick, who still held the document in his hands, rather to his host's discomfort, who well knew what temptation was, and had become anxious for the return of his property, 'which I think has hitherto escaped our notice: in examining the document we have neglected the seals. I have just discovered by close scrutiny that they represent that ancient game the quintin. Here is the upright beam, here is the bar, here is the bag.'

The company crowded round, most of them with magnifying glasses, which gave them the appearance of beetles who, with projecting eyes and solemn looks, investigate for the first time some new and promising article of food.

‘At the top of the seal, if I am not mistaken,’ continued Sir Frederick in pompous tones, and with the air of a man without whose intelligence a great discovery would have passed unnoticed, ‘you will recognise the ring, to unhook which with his lance was the object of the tilter; if he failed to accomplish it, the bar, moving swiftly on its pivot, swung round the bag, which, striking smartly on the tilter’s back, was almost certain of unhorsing him.’

‘We see it—it is here; there is no doubt of it,’ gasped the excited company.

‘Now, mark you, this is not only curious,’ resumed the knight, ‘but corroborative of the genuineness of the document in a very high degree. Observe the very close analogy which this instrument bears to the name of Shake-spear. Is it not almost certain, therefore, that this seal belonged to our immortal bard, and was always used by him in his legal transactions?’

‘Then rose the hushed amaze of hand and eye.’ For some moments no voice broke the awful silence; but presently, under deep emotion, Mr. Erin spoke.

‘A revelation,’ he said, ‘always needs an expounder, and in our friend Sir Frederick we have found one. Thanks to your keen intelligence, sir, the value of this deed has been placed beyond all question.’

‘I am very glad to have been of some slight service to the cause of literary discovery,’ returned Sir Frederick modestly. ‘Perhaps some other lights may strike me if you will allow me to take the document home with me.’

‘Indeed I will do nothing of the kind,’ put in Mr. Erin precipitately; ‘not, of course, my dear friend, that I have the least doubt of your good faith,’ he added in gentler tones, ‘but in justice to my son—unhappily absent, and to whom it belongs—I can hardly suffer the deed to leave my custody. Perhaps at another time—for his friend was looking anything but pleased—‘your request shall be complied with, but at present it must be here for the satisfaction of doubters. Such a person, I have reason to believe, is among us even now.’

A murmur of indignation arose from all sides. They cast at

one another such furious glances as the Thracian nymphs may have done before tearing Orpheus to pieces.

'Yes, Mr. Dennis,' continued the host sarcastically, addressing the unhappy Frank, who had hitherto remained unnoticed and quiescent, 'I have reason to believe from the expression of your features, when I connect it with certain remarks that fell from you in Shottery Park the other day, that you are our only sceptic.'

If to an assembly of divines in Convocation 'the Infidel,' so often alluded to in the abstract in their discourses from the pulpit, had been suddenly presented to them in the concrete, they could not have looked at him with a greater horror than that with which the company regarded the young man thus thrust upon their attention.

'Indeed, indeed, Mr. Erin,' pleaded Dennis, 'I have never uttered a syllable that could be construed, or even perverted, into doubt.'

'One may look daggers and yet speak none,' returned Mr. Erin with severity (and that he should thus venture to misquote his favourite bard showed even more than his tone the perturbation of his mind). 'The document, however, will be left here—*here,*' he repeated significantly, 'for your private scrutiny and investigation; I only trust that you may find cause to withdraw your aspersions, groundless in themselves, as they are disparaging to my dear son William Henry, and offensive to this respectable and learned company, about, as I see with regret, to take their leave.'

If Mr. Erin had suddenly seized a hammer and smote him on the forehead, Mr. Dennis could hardly have been more astonished than at this gratuitous onslaught. He resolved to wait till the company had dispersed, which, at that broad hint received from its host, it proceeded to do, and then demand an explanation.

Mr. Erin, however, anticipated him. 'I was somewhat more vehement, Dennis,' he said, 'in the remarks that I addressed to you just now than the occasion demanded; but the fact is, some sort of diversion was imperatively demanded. My friends, I saw, were getting turbulent; the discovery of the quintin on the seal was too much for them, already excited as they were by the exhibition of this extraordinary document. Sir Frederick in particular, under circumstances of such extreme temptation, I knew to be capable of any outrage. I made you—I confess it—the scapegoat, by means of which the safety of the precious manuscript has been secured. In compensation, take it and look at it as long as you like. What I said about your incredulity, though somewhat justi-

fied by the past, you must admit, was in the main but a pious fraud. Like any man of intelligence, you cannot but revere the document. It is yours, say, for the next five minutes. Then it goes into my iron case, for "Who shall be true to us," as he whose honoured name lies there before you, in his own handwriting, has observed, "if we be unsecret to ourselves?"

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

ALTHOUGH it may be very true that kings can affect but little the happiness of their subjects, the petty kings of every household—from Paterfamilias the First down to his latest descendants—have a very important influence in that way. The difference which a morose or cheerful parent makes in the lives of those beneath their roof is incalculable. In the one case the atmosphere of existence is all cloud, in the other, all sunshine. It must be confessed that up to this period the Jupiter of the little household in Norfolk Street had been something of a Jupiter Pluvius. There were storms, there were tears; and even when it was not so, the domestic sky was sullen. From the date of the discovery however of that note of hand, from William Shakespeare to John Hemyng, the weather cleared. Moreover, matters looked all the brighter by contrast. It is one of the many advantages that selfish persons of strong will possess, that when they do condescend to be genial, people are prone to believe that they always were so, or at all events that they have misjudged them in setting them down as churlish.

So in the orient, when the gracious light
Lifts up his long-hid head, each under eye
Doth homage to this new appearing sight,

And mortal looks adore his majesty.

Mr. Erin's domestics began to acknowledge that their master was not half a bad fellow; and his niece, to whom, however, it is but fair to say, he had always been kind, was quite triumphant over his new-found good nature. 'Now, Willie, did I not always tell you so?' &c., while Frank Dennis had reason to believe that he had at last been quite forgiven his heretical doubts as to whether deer could shed tears as easily as their antlers.

As to William Henry himself, the strides he had made in Mr.

Erin's favour, thanks to that 'find' of his in the 'Templar's' chambers, was something magical, as if he had got seven-league boots on. His father even called him Samuel, as though he were verily and indeed that son he had lost with all the hopes that were wrapped up in him. It must be confessed, however, that this may have been partly owing to the birth of new hopes; William Henry, indeed, though he had twice visited his friend in the Temple since that one momentous occasion, had found nothing new—or rather very old—there; but on the other hand, what Mr. Erin justly thought a great piece of good fortune, and one that showed promise of much more, had befallen him. On looking over his patron's papers he came across a deed of no great antiquity in truth, but which to that gentleman himself was especially valuable, since it established his right to a certain property that had long been the subject of litigation. For this, something was certainly due to the young man himself, since, but for his legal learning and knowledge of the nature of the document, he might easily have passed it over as being of no importance. It was, therefore, not so very surprising that the old gentleman in a sudden glow of gratitude, for which his mind, from its natural leaning towards the young fellow was, as it were, 'ready laid,' had given him a promise that whatever he might henceforth discover among his papers of general interest, should by way of recompense for the service he had rendered him, become his own.

Gladly as William Henry himself doubtless received this mark of his patron's favour, his joy could hardly have exceeded that of Mr. Erin when the news was communicated to him. It must needs be confessed, however, that his gratitude was not wholly dissociated from a sense of favours to come.

'Why, my dear lad,' he cried, 'this note of hand of Shakespeare's, priceless as it is, may be yet outdone by what remains to be discovered. In this strange treasure-trove of which you speak, of the contents of which, both as to their nature and value, their owner seems to be wholly ignorant, there may be, for all we know, whole letters in Shakespeare's handwriting, copies of his plays, a sonnet or two, possibly even the skeleton of some play which he never filled in with flesh-and-blood characters, the hint of some divine tragedy—gracious Goodness!' and Mr. Erin threw up his hands in speechless ecstasy as though a glimpse of Heaven had been vouchsafed to him of which it was not lawful for him to discourse further.

'Of course it is possible, sir,' returned William Henry gravely. 'But for my part I dare not trust myself to think of what may be lying in yonder lumber rooms. Just now, indeed, I am giving my attention solely to my patron's library, arranging the bookshelves and making out the catalogue. After his generous promise I purposely forego the pleasure of investigation lest I should be considered grasping.'

'Fire!' interrupted the old man suddenly with tremulous anxiety. 'Think of fire! You know what happened at Clopton House; and though of course your patron would never wilfully destroy a scrap of paper with any antiquity about it, yet who can guard against accident—carelessness? One spark from a candle and the world may be robbed of we know not what. Oh, my dear lad, for the world's sake, if not for mine, I pray you lose no time. Never mind your work; I'll settle all that with Bingley. Stick to the lumber-room—I mean the precious manuscripts.

Dull not device by coldness and delay.'

The eagerness of the old man was in its intensity quite touching. No lover entreating his mistress for the momentous monosyllable could have been more earnest, or even more passionate. William Henry himself, who, throughout the late stirring incidents, which promised to affect his future so nearly, had kept himself studiously calm and quiet, was deeply moved.

'I will do my best, sir,' he replied in agitated tones; 'nothing pleases me better than to give you pleasure.'

'That is well said,' returned the old man graciously. Margaret looked on with approving eyes. Supposing even what the young man had so rashly set his heart on should bear no fruit—if his dream should not be realised—it was surely well that such friendly relations should be established between him and the man who, if not his own flesh and blood, was his natural protector. It was very satisfactory also to see that Willie was responding to Mr. Erin's overtures of good will.

As to these last there could be no doubt as to her uncle's change of front towards her cousin (to whom indeed he had hitherto shown no front at all, but had turned his back upon him); and that very evening there was another proof of it. As the three were sitting down to supper, William Henry noticed that the table was laid for four. Under ordinary circumstances he would have taken it for granted that Dennis was coming, but he knew that the

architect was out of town on business. He was not yet on such intimate terms with the master of the house as to inquire who was the expected guest, and supposed him to be one of the Shakespearean literati who were now dropping in at all times.

Presently there was a knock at the door, whereat Margaret looked at her uncle with a significant smile, and her uncle looked at William Henry.

‘I have got a pleasant surprise for you, my lad,’ he said gaily. ‘Some time ago—indeed it was before Maggie came to live with us—you had a friend whose companionship I thought was doing you no good, and I gave him the cold shoulder. It is never too late to own oneself in the wrong; he certainly did you no harm and perhaps intended none. It is only natural that you should have friends of your own age, and that they should be made welcome in your father’s house; so, as you told me he was in town, I sent round a note to him to ask him to drop in to-night to supper.’

Before William Henry could reply, the door opened and the servant announced Mr. Reginald Talbot.

The new-comer was a fresh-complexioned young gentleman of about eighteen or so, rather clumsily built for his age, with long, reddish-brown hair and bold eyes. They did not look at all like near-sighted eyes, but he wore round his neck what was then called a quizzing-glass, held by the hand, through which he now surveyed the present company. His attire, if not more fashionable than Mr. Erin’s guests were wont to wear, showed a much greater taste for colours. His waistcoat was heavily laced, and the buckles on his shoes, if, as was probable, they were not made of real diamonds, shone by candlelight as though they had been.

‘It is very kind of you, Mr. Erin,’ he said, ‘pon honour, to let me drop in in this way. If I had known that there were ladies present’—here he glanced at Margaret and bowed like a dancing-master—‘I would have put on more suitable apparel.’

‘Pooh, pooh! you’re smart enough,’ said Mr. Erin in a tone in which contempt and politeness struggled ludicrously for the upper hand. ‘This is only my niece, Margaret Slade; there’s your old friend, William Henry. Didn’t I say, my lad’—here he turned to his son and clapped him on the shoulder—‘that I had got a surprise for you?’

Of course Mr. Erin had meant it well, just as he had done when he had made him that priceless present of ‘Stokes, the

Vaulting Master,' but, as in that case, it would have seemed to a close observer that he had not exactly hit upon the meed of merit most to William Henry's fancy. That young gentleman shook hands indeed with the new-comer cordially enough, but, whether from surprise or some other cause, could at first find no better topic to converse upon than the weather.

'I suppose,' he said, 'you have not been having much more sun where you have come from than we have had.'

'Sun!' echoed the other drily. 'I suppose there is not much difference in the weather of Norfolk Street and that of the Strand. I have been in London, as I wrote to you I should be, these ten days, and not a hundred yards away, if you had cared to come and see me.'

'I didn't understand that from your letter,' stammered William Henry. 'I thought——'

'I think I can explain this matter, Mr. Talbot,' interposed Mr. Erin; 'satisfactorily as far as William Henry is concerned, if somewhat to my own disadvantage. Under a misconception which it is unnecessary to explain, I had tacitly forbidden my son to visit you. I am sorry for it. I hope you will now make up for it by seeing a good deal of one another while you remain in town.'

'You're very good, I'm sure,' said Talbot. He looked from father to son in a vague and puzzled way, and then he looked at Margaret through his spyglass. The young lady, annoyed to be so surveyed, cast down her eyes, and Mr. Erin, with some revival of his old caustic tone, inquired, 'Do you propose to deprive your friends at home of your society for any length of time?'

'A week or two, perhaps more,' returned the other, without a shade of annoyance; he had evidently taken his host's remark *au sérieux*. 'I am come up on business of my own,' he added grandly; 'for as to old Docket, though my articles are not yet run out, I treat him as I please.'

'You are in the fortunate position of having a competence of your own, I conclude.'

'Well, yes; that is, I come into it on my majority. Something in land and also in hand. I shall then leave the law and pursue the profession of a man of letters.'

'Heaven deliver us!' ejaculated Mr. Erin.

'Sir?' exclaimed the visitor.

'And make us thankful for all its mercies,' added his host, bending over his plate.

‘I beg pardon ; grace,’ muttered Mr. Talbot, growing red to the roots of his hair.

Margaret reddened too, for it was not usual with her uncle to say grace ; and William Henry reddened also with suppressed laughter. He had not given his father credit for so much dexterity.

‘And now I daresay, William Henry, you would like a talk with your old friend in your own room,’ observed Mr. Erin ; ‘you must make Mr. Talbot quite at home here.’

The young gentleman looked as if he would quite as soon have remained in the society of Miss Margaret, who had obviously attracted his admiration, while William Henry could hardly repress a groan. But so broad a hint could scarcely be ignored, and the two young men retreated together accordingly.

‘I hope William Henry is pleased, my dear,’ said the old gentleman, when he found himself alone with his niece. ‘He cannot say that I have not made some little sacrifice. But why had he not been to see this fellow—I gave him leave.’

‘Nay, sir, you did not give him leave implicitly ; you said that if he met Mr. Talbot he was to give him your compliments. Willie is always so very particular not to overstep your permission in any way.’

Mr. Erin muttered an articulate sound such as a bumble-bee makes when imprisoned between two panes of glass. It was not exactly ‘hum,’ but it resembled it. William Henry was now all that he could wish him to be, but there had been occasions—though to be sure there was no need to think of them—when he had not been so very careful to obey the paternal commands.

‘Well, I hope he appreciates my little surprise,’ he murmured ; ‘“a man of letters,” forsooth ! Never, never, was I so pestered by a popinjay.’

(To be continued.)

